

CHAPTER IV: CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

1 THE EMERGENCY PHASE

National Preparedness and Early Warning

1. The effectiveness of national response to the emergency reflected the extent of country preparedness and regional early warnings. Also, the establishment of ad-hoc political disaster management structures after the disaster struck, limited the use of available institutional memory and know-how existing within many institutions in the four countries. It hampered, for example, at least in the early critical phase, the effectiveness of collaboration with both the NGOs and the UN, the former having an important field presence and the latter having previously established cooperative relationship with the existing civil defense structures and a comparative advantage regarding information management and access to the international community. In keeping with national legislation, the governments' decision to request international assistance was directly tied to their declarations of 'states of emergency' or 'national disaster', which, in turn, were dependent upon political considerations.
2. In order to be effective, the UN response has to fit into and support the overall national and international relief efforts. Coordination structures should, therefore, be designed to facilitate the interface between the national and the international systems. The UN's strategy must be to add value by providing an independent assessment of the physical and social effects; in facilitating the rapid mobilization of the international response; in providing reliable and timely information to all in-country actors, including the victims themselves, and to the international community; and in supporting the national coordination structures and setting-up coordination mechanisms at the disaster site.

The DMT Experience

3. Experience in the affected countries indicated that the DMTs work more effectively in the emergency phase when they can rely upon previous and on-going inter-agency collaboration and the field presence of humanitarian response agencies. The actions and strategies of the DMTs varied considerably, ranging from being mechanisms for rapid decision-making to being conduits for information sharing and dissemination. The team spirit prevailing within the UN system in Honduras, where agencies reacted on the basis of their own experience and abilities rather than on a strict observation of their respective programmes, is a lesson that should be replicated more widely.
4. Coordination between DMTs and NGOs was most effective where NGOs' created their own coordination structures and sent representatives to DMT meetings. The absence at DMT meetings of the Red Cross movement and some other key actors, despite their relatively limited capacities, is unfortunate in view of their 'front line'

role in response. All four Resident Coordinators should therefore, address their participation in DMTs.

5. The assistance provided by the four UNDAC Teams to the Resident Coordinators in compiling and disseminating information on the disaster situation proved valuable.¹³ Members of these teams and other experts from agencies also added specialized qualifications.
6. The in-country availability of the UNDAC team in Guatemala from the outset of the disaster proved to be a special asset and points to the need for OCHA to pursue its policy of training national UN staff for UNDAC teams. In Nicaragua, the addition to the UNDAC team of staff deployed by UNHCR also proved to be an asset to the Resident Coordinators for the rehabilitation phase. The participation of UN agency staff on future UNDAC teams is a must for the strengthening of the overall UN system response capability.
7. There is also a need to heighten awareness within the UN system of what the UNDAC teams represent; what they can and cannot do; and their level of expertise. This would ensure that the Resident Coordinators drive the deployment of UNDAC teams.

Deployment of Local UN Staff

8. The immediate deployment of programme/technical staff by Country Teams to severely affected areas was an excellent initiative. However, the Mission stresses the impact of the Inter-agency teams fielded in seven locations in Honduras and the highly visible and effective presence of some 150 national and international UNVs. These teams focussed on assisting local authorities, supporting local emergency committees with technical and financial resources and providing first hand information to the DMTs. This pro-active and impact-oriented approach should be replicated in the future in major emergencies. Such a practice also helps decentralize project design, formulation and follow-up throughout the rehabilitation and recovery phases. Moreover, had such staff had a pre-arranged mission kit and adequate communications equipment, their effectiveness would have been even greater.

Media Relations and External Missions

9. An additional pressure on the workload of the Resident Coordinators, and each member of the DMT at the peak of a crisis is the need to regularly respond to the media to provide insight on the situation; comment on political and often highly sensitive issues; and give clear, concise and educated information on what the United Nations is doing and why. In all countries visited the point was made that the Resident Coordinators and some agency representatives needed from the onset of the

¹³ A total of fifteen UNDAC members, originating from seven (mainly Latin American) countries and UN agencies were deployed, making this the most extensive and complex UNDAC operation to date.

disaster professional support from experienced public information officers familiar with the country.

10. Similarly, high-level missions from both within the UN and from bilateral donors, though useful for awareness- and fund-raising purposes, nevertheless required excessive time of Resident Coordinators, Agencies' representatives and their staff that diverts attention from emergency activities. Greater cooperation among agencies and related institutions in mounting joint missions should thus be advocated by Resident Coordinators and supported by Headquarters.

Contingency Funding

11. Contrary to PAHO, UNICEF and WFP, who have more flexible procedures, OCHA and UNDP's provisions for immediate contingency funding were inadequate. Hence, it became a serious impediment to the ability of the UN system to assist in supporting the immediate needs of the emergency. Additional funding would have increased the capacity to rent more helicopters; to purchase rafts for search and rescue operations; and to transport more relief supplies and potable water. It would also have permitted more detailed aerial assessments of the disaster situation and needs, thereby alleviating the initial chronic dearth of data required for mounting the international response. One potential option for addressing such shortfalls in future is to utilize the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF).¹⁴
12. It is evident to the Mission that Resident Coordinators are not fully aware of all the options of contingency funding mechanisms at their disposal and the manner of accessing them. The time lag between donors announcing contributions and the subsequent payment and resource allocations to the field also constrains a more effective UN system intervention during the emergency phase. The mechanism applied by OCHA and two donors (Norway and Italy) on cash advances worked but the size of the contributions was too limited to cover all the needs.
13. Hurricane Mitch proved the need for special, simplified administrative procedures for emergencies, particularly procurement and rental of helicopters/aircraft. Agencies involved in disaster response should review and, if necessary, update and re-circulate their regulations in this matter. For example, UNDP special procurement procedures issued in May 1993 for UNDP Offices in disaster-prone countries were only valid for an initial period of six months and were to be extended only subject to individual requests.¹⁵

¹⁴ The CERF was designed as a cash-flow mechanism to ensure a rapid and coordinated response by the United Nations system to emergencies. Hitherto, it has only been used for complex emergencies

¹⁵ UNDP Finance Manual, Chapter VI, Part I, Financial, Administrative and Personnel Procedures in Disaster/Emergency Related Activities (UNDP/ADM/93/28 of 25 May 1993)

Relations with Headquarters

14. DMTs were also unclear about the organizational division of responsibilities and 'who is who' at Headquarters in New York and Geneva (e.g., the relations between UNDP's Emergency Response Division, its Regional Bureau, and OCHA's Disaster Response Branch in Geneva, as well as the respective emergency departments in PAHO/WHO, WFP, and UNICEF). The UN response would have been facilitated if Resident Coordinators had pre-established information on commercial suppliers in the region, such as for helicopters. Many of these funding and relational issues could be effectively addressed and resolved by the regular updating of relevant information by concerned UN Headquarters and by continually functioning DMTs that address the UN system's overall preparedness strategies.

Military and Civil Defense Assets

15. The provision of foreign military and civil defense assets (MCDAs), such as helicopters, aircraft, medical teams, engineering teams and specialized equipment is fundamental for access to victims and for repairs to basic infrastructure and utilities. Cooperation between foreign assets and authorities at the local level was good, however, the use of MCDAs was sometimes delayed because of poor interaction at the national level with the emergency response structures. No comprehensive plan for the use of foreign MCDAs was adopted, either nationally or regionally, resulting in each actor selecting their geographical zone of intervention through direct consultations with respective governments.
16. Communications between the UN and the MCDAs mobilized by OCHA from one donor country were not effective, suggesting that the role of the UN in the coordination or development of partnerships with MCDAs still requires clarifications. A lesson learned would be that MCDA providers post a liaison officer in MCDU as part of the package of making such assets available.

2 REHABILITATION AND RECOVERY: THE ROLE OF THE UN SYSTEM

Facing Structural Vulnerability

1. **The post-Mitch scenario:** As they take stock of rehabilitation needs and plan future reconstruction and development programmes, all actors concerned are aware of the necessity to address the underlying structural causes, most of which are conditioned by formidable social, economic and political constraints. Government documents prepared since the disaster for the most part acknowledge that new opportunities have been created for tackling past and present challenges with renewed vigour. The question of how much is realisable in the medium- and long-term remains open. The ever-present issue of land reform is not making much headway.
2. There are differences of emphasis, and the time horizons that governments are setting for reaching major goals vary widely. In some instances, rehabilitation,

reconstruction and development activities are seen and planned in somewhat rigid compartments, in other instances related programmes merge to form a more or less uninterrupted sequence. In all cases, there are huge expectations about future external assistance and cooperation. At the time of the Mission's visit, all governments were engaged in the preparation of the sector programmes that are due for presentation to the Consultative Group in May 1999.

3. **Role of the UN system:** This, briefly stated, is the current scenario in which the UN agencies present are providing support in accordance with their respective roles and mandates. Apart from directing their attention to immediate rehabilitation needs, Country Teams stressed that Mitch had not given them cause to modify or reorient their established programmes, as they were already addressing development concerns whose fundamental significance was once more revealed by the impact of the disaster.
4. In their view, the damage inflicted by floods and landslides convincingly vindicate the thrust of existing programmes, which aim at protecting the environment and modernising governance at all levels; at promoting decentralisation; at improving health services; at ensuring equal rights and opportunities through social inclusion and respect for diversity; and at reducing poverty by stimulating productive potential and employment and by providing access to basic social services at the local level. However, Country Teams also stressed the scarcity of resources and poor support of various UN agencies at Headquarters as well as donor members of their own Executive Bodies.
5. Priority programmes of this order are rationalised in the Country Cooperation Frameworks and similar documents made available to the Mission. UN-supported programmes will accordingly continue to focus on sustainable human development. They will continue to promote a more rational use of river basins and watersheds, the larger of which are shared with neighbouring countries. They will also continue the effort to improve social service, to advocate for the provision of heightened food security; and give impetus to the development of the productive sector, in particular at municipal and local levels, as well as to ensure access to quality health and education services for all.
6. The last ten years have witnessed a spectacular growth in the number of NGOs in all countries of the region, many of which have formed ties with international NGOs and UN agencies engaged in advocacy, humanitarian relief as well as development. For historical and political reasons, relations between the governments and the organisations of civil society have not been close, and at times polarised. In all countries, the UN system has initiated processes designed to lead to a sustained dialogue between the government and civil society. The hurricane disaster has provided a new opportunity for invigorating such contacts, and judging by the testimony of NGO representatives met, these efforts would benefit the UN system effort.

7. **Towards a community focus:** National sector programmes are unwieldy instruments when addressing local level priorities in the rehabilitation phase. As observed by the Mission, many needs that are vital to the restoration of community life, socially and economically, are not attended to if left to sector programmes prepared centrally. In the general case, municipalities do not have the opportunity to participate in the preparation of reconstruction programmes that will be submitted to the Consultative Group in Stockholm.
8. The need to supplement national sector plans with the active participation of local and municipal levels is accordingly, in the Mission's view, an important lesson that can be drawn from the Central American experience.
9. In the two countries hardest hit, Honduras and Nicaragua, the Resident Coordinators are attempting novel approaches to decentralise programming work, using OCHA and UNDP TRAC 1.1.3 funds to outpost staff and establish a presence, if only temporary, to assist municipal authorities and local communities in programming and prioritising their needs. In Honduras, for instance, an interagency initiative called 'Field Operations' entails the out-posting of one to three programme officers in at least seven different locations. They are to advise elected municipal officials and local communities on how they can draw on the assistance of UN agencies, on formulating projects, monitoring their implementation as well as on coordinating UN agency activities with operations undertaken locally by other organisations and NGOs.
10. This *modus operandi* has yet to prove itself, but already appears to be yielding positive results. During its visit to northern Honduras, the Mission observed three such projects undertaken under the aegis of the municipal authorities, with resources provided by or through the UN. One involved the repair of a two kilometres long road breach that had isolated communities numbering 15,000 people. Another was pumping stagnant waters from an area inundating some 120 houses in advance of repairing a broken river dike. A third, food-for-work project was excavating silt and sand deposited in houses and remaking village roads for a community of some 170 families. Thousands of families are still awaiting such support.
11. On the basis of their ongoing contacts with donors, Resident Coordinators believe that recovery projects of this nature, developed at the micro-level, stand good chances of receiving donor support, being more manageable in terms of the size of funding required than large-scale sector programmes. The Mission endorses this view and commends the approach as it believes that these are essential activities during the ongoing recovery effort. However, it hopes that this will become a platform for larger, socially centred, fully participatory and multi-sectoral programmes yielding sustainable human development processes.

Disaster Reduction

12. In the area of disaster reduction and mitigation, the UN system must consolidate its linkages with government institutions and help strengthen the existing disaster preparedness structures, especially within the line ministries. Support of the civil defense structures, despite their limited mandates and predominantly response-oriented approaches, is the first step towards a longer-term goal of supporting the establishment of permanent, sustainable and comprehensive national disaster reduction institutions that feed into all government ministries and the national development process. In the interim, it is contingent upon Country Teams identify their best counterparts for implementation of mitigation activities, and work with them to ensure that preparedness planning is comprehensive.
13. Although many of the existing programmes of the UN system already address many of the underlying causes that result in disasters having such severe impacts upon Central America, disaster reduction has to be mainstreamed into all country programming. The UN system must continue to advocate heightened awareness among all relevant government ministries of the need to entrench disaster mitigation and prevention into the national reconstruction and future development processes. Such advocacy should also extend to donors.
14. Since preparedness and response committees at municipal and community levels are essentially driven through civil society initiatives rather than by the civil defense authorities, special attention should be given to strengthening such structures. Moreover, given the relative impermanence and the politically driven nature of existing national disaster management structures, the most realistic and lasting interventions that the UN system can make at this time in disaster reduction should focus upon community and municipal levels, with support from central level technicians when they exist.
15. Given this heavy dependence on civil society for responding to disasters, as well as the UN system's specific need to enlist the support of the NGO community, it would be expeditious for Resident Coordinators to include representation of civil society in their ongoing DMT meetings. This would greatly facilitate information exchange and consolidate partnerships. The Red Cross Societies and a representative from any recognized NGO consortium would serve this purpose.
16. Because of the high risk of natural disasters prevailing in all four countries, the Resident Coordinators should each have a dedicated and trained 'emergency officer'. UNDP can facilitate this by placing a technical advisory post into the region, to work in close cooperation with specialists fielded by PAHO/WHO, UNICEF, WFP, OFDA and the IFRC, to provide disaster reduction backstopping for Country Teams and their partners. Training programmes in disaster preparedness, as well as in identifying potential mitigation and prevention activities that might be included in normal country programming, should be given high priority for each of the Country

Teams. This is a role that UNDP's Emergency Response Division and relevant Headquarters should take on as soon as possible.

- 17 In the immediate aftermath of Mitch, the Country Teams were overwhelmed with the response to the needs created by the disaster and faced difficulties in fulfilling the tasks required to lay the foundations for recovery. Capacities to carry-out immediate economic and social impact assessments and manage basic information were not always available or sufficient. Although the UNDAC teams provide some backstopping, it is incumbent upon agencies' headquarters to support the Country Teams in promoting the early 'recovery' inputs through both heightened training of national officers and through rapid deployment of recovery specialists when the scale of the disaster overtakes the local capacities. In the case of UNDP, this is also clearly a role that its Emergency Response Division should assume.
18. With respect to the UN system's own levels of preparedness and ongoing purview of how it can entrench disaster mitigation into the national development process, the primary lessons learned from the current experience are that:
 - ❑ Resident Coordinators should maintain a permanent DMT working group, made up of a cadre of trained national and international officers, tasked with ongoing monitoring of risks of natural or other disasters and developing for the Resident Coordinators and their inter-agency teams appropriate preparedness plans for likely disaster events;
 - ❑ whenever possible, such as when early warnings of an approaching hurricane are sounded, the DMT should be called together to prepare contingency plans for the eventuality of a disaster occurring;
 - ❑ the DMT working groups be tasked with ongoing review of all new programme initiatives to ensure that risk mitigation is being addressed when appropriate.

Strengthening of Country Teams

19. In the rehabilitation and recovery phase, the UN Country Teams have found themselves tasked with additional responsibilities in the following areas:
 - ❑ Preparation of the Inter-Agency Transitional Appeal
 - ❑ Provision of technical assistance for the formulation of long-term sector programmes
 - ❑ Provision of technical assistance in the assessment of current disaster prevention policies and practices, as well as the formulation of disaster reduction and mitigation strategies
 - ❑ Operational field presence, with capacity to programme and monitor UN-sponsored projects
 - ❑ Expansion of regular programmes or introduction of new activities
 - ❑ Taking the lead or filling gaps in addressing social priorities.
20. In the nature of things, the needs of the different offices of the DMT will vary considerably according to the demands placed on them in the above-listed areas. It should be recognised that many of these offices are very small and consist of only one

to two professional officers; they will need reinforcement in virtually all of the above tasks if called upon to make a meaningful contribution.

21. As regard the need for in-house staff training, the Mission that there was little familiarity of many staff with OCHA, PAHO, UNICEF and UNDP procedures to be applied in emergency and post-emergency situations and with existing funding possibilities. Few were, for instance, aware of the existence of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund.
22. As regards the formulation of long-term sector programmes, primarily a government responsibility, Country Teams are variously engaged, and it is not possible to give a general prescription as to whether, where and how Country Teams should be strengthened. For obvious reasons, IDB and the World Bank are playing leading roles. As for UN agencies, assessments will have to be made on a case by case basis, ranging from technical support for the formulation of assistance frameworks to providing ad hoc technical assistance to government departments involved in the preparation of sector programmes. In the case of Guatemala and Honduras, Country Teams had constituted 'Thematic Groups' on different sectoral topics with the participation of bilateral agencies, International Financial Institutions, NGOs and government representatives, as a forum for the exchange of information and as a device to facilitate coordination.
23. The establishment of an operational field presence, such as that being attempted on a trial basis for six months in Honduras and in Nicaragua, will also require additional resources if they are to be sustained over the long term. Should these initiatives generate a sufficient number of projects for financing, they can also create a source of income enabling the Country Teams to strengthen their staff establishment.
24. In the aftermath of emergencies, most UN agencies are committed to maintaining or expanding ongoing programmes and at the same time to meet new demands that are placed on their resources as a result of the emergency. This may entail the reallocation of funds and the re-assignment of personnel, and must be taken into account in Headquarters establishments when considering the allocation of supplementary resources.

Raising funds for the Transition

25. **The funding gap:** As argued above in Chapter III, Section 2, relief activities beyond the life-saving phase after the disaster, and those focusing on recovery and development are closely linked at the level of goals, objectives and rights. In this regard, therefore, there is no 'transition gap'. To the extent that a gap exists, it is in terms of resources needed to build further on the work that started during the emergency and integrate the development perspective.
26. The Transitional Appeal does not claim to fill the entire gap, as a large part of the resources made available by donors bilaterally is channelled through NGOs and civil

society. As many contributions would have been made regardless of any appeal, the Transitional Appeal has received a very limited response, reaching some 30-40 percent of the target (according to the Mission's estimates, based on available information)¹⁶, two months after it was issued. The Mission believes, however, that such appeals are likely to be more effective if they are the outcome of field-driven, participatory approaches, and the timing and formatting of individual sector and sub-sector programmes in the appeal document are significantly modified.

27. The Mission believes that the issue of ownership must be addressed if similar future inter-agency appeals are to remain credible and effective, and is making a general recommendation to this effect.

¹⁶ If the contributions to WFP are discounted, the response amounts to only fifteen percent

CHAPTER V: RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❑ The recommendations below should be reviewed and/or by the Inter-agency Standing Committee Working Group on Emergencies which should take action as appropriate.

1 EMERGENCY PHASE

On Coordination

- ❑ Under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator, the Disaster Management Teams in all countries have played a vital and effective role in coordinating UN system responses, once the disaster struck. There was however, some evidence that the DMTs were not adequately prepared for a disaster of the magnitude that occurred and that there is room for further improvement in this area.
- ❑ The Mission recommends that:
 - 1) the UN Country Teams identify ahead of emergency situations UN staff (especially National Professional Officers) among all agencies in the country with special skills and experience in disaster management, for quick mobilisation (such exercises may well reveal the need for additional training of DMT staff);
 - 2) UN Country Teams, in cooperation with their partners, undertake and keep up-to-date, an inventory of existing logistical capacities of government agencies, UN organisations, the private sector and NGOs;
 - 3) respective Headquarters of DMTs members provide them with lists of organisational units and names of key staff, designated as focal points or one-stop operation centres at headquarters, during emergency operations;
 - 4) DMTs consider that the Red Cross movement, representatives of any NGO consortia or other key disaster response agencies be invited to participate in the national DMTs in disaster-prone countries;
 - 5) at the initiation of the Resident Coordinators, closer cooperation be established between OCHA, WFP, UNDP(ERD), UNICEF and PAHO/WHO to harmonise capacity-building programmes in disaster management and to ensure team work when disaster strikes;
 - 6) the Resident Coordinators with the Country Teams, ensure that efforts be stepped up to develop, adopt and simulate disaster plans and emergency

procedures applicable to UN personnel and buildings in disaster-prone regions, if not already covered in existing Security Plans.

On Information Management

- ❑ Information gathering, processing and dissemination, including the assessment of needs, are key elements of coordination and represent an important added value that the UN system can offer to the disaster-stricken country and to the international community. Several commendable initiatives were taken by DMTs in this area during the Mitch emergency. These should be built on further.
- ❑ The Mission recommends that:
 - 1) at the outset of a disaster, the DMT dispatch to the disaster-stricken areas adequately equipped inter-agency teams, incorporating as appropriate UNDAC members, for on-site needs assessments and support of emergency and urgent rehabilitation activities;
 - 2) Resident Coordinators open a recognised website, as soon as possible after the onset of the emergency (with daily updates) to disseminate analysed information gathered from all sources, and enabling OCHA and other UN agencies to extract daily situation reports relevant to the mobilisation of funds and other responses;
 - 3) OCHA and UNDP (ERD), in cooperation with DMTs, develop guidelines for such websites;
 - 4) DMTs provide staff fielded for information gathering purposes and for local capacity-building with adequate communications tools, taking into account any facilities prepositioned through the UNICEF/WFP emergency communications network;
 - 5) UNDP (ERD) support Resident Coordinators with the temporary assignment of a public information officer to ensure better communication with national media, affected populations and international audiences;
 - 6) DMTs undertake a lessons learned exercise on SUMA (Supply Management system developed by PAHO/WHO), in the context of the response to Hurricane Mitch with a view to extending its possible adoption by other UN system agencies and national agencies;
 - 7) UN Country Team should advocate for the assessment of the social sectors and the impact on the most vulnerable groups, in collaboration with the agencies' relevant national and local partners. It should then attempt to fill any gaps in the response, transition and recovery phases (i.e., following the example of the Honduras 'The Human Impact of Mitch' report).

On Early Resourcing of Immediate Responses

- ❑ The early availability of cash resources is crucial to an effective and swift response on the part of the UN agencies represented on the DMTs. With the exception of UNICEF, the limited stand-by funds already provided by OCHA and PAHO/WHO on a contingency basis, and by UNDP through TRAC 1.1.3, are rapidly exhausted and need to be supplemented.
- ❑ The Mission recommends that:
 - 1) Resident Coordinators, with the support of each agency, actively pursue local level negotiations with donors with a view to establishing mechanisms allowing immediate access to funds according to agreed criteria in the event of emergency scenarios;
 - 2) OCHA concurrently expand existing stand-by funding arrangements with established donors and also include additional donors;
 - 3) UN agencies, at headquarters level, cooperate with OCHA and UNDP in assessing the regional availability of helicopters for emergencies and in developing, on a competitive basis, contingency procurement agreements with commercial charter companies to provide rapid capacity for airlifting persons and supplies;
 - 4) each UN agency review the provisions of their respective manuals, on the financial, administrative and personnel procedures in disaster/emergency related activities, and recirculate these instructions to field-offices in disaster-prone countries;
 - 5) in case of emergencies, UNDP and other UN Headquarters concerned, delegate authority for the contracting of aircraft/helicopters, presently excluded from existing provisions, to Resident Coordinators and agency country representatives, taking into account any arrangements negotiated by headquarters, as recommended under point 3 above.

On OCHA Response Instruments

- ❑ Based on past experience, OCHA has developed a number of response instruments in order to support the UN system, both at headquarters and in the field, in providing reliable and timely information and in mobilising resources.
- ❑ In the light of the additional experience made in the context of Hurricane Mitch, the Mission recommends that:

- 1) OCHA create better awareness in the UN system on the concept, capacities and *modus operandi* of UNDAC teams, of the operation of the Pisa Warehouse, the MCDU (Military and Civil Defense Unit), as well as the use of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF) for natural disasters, notably through visits to disaster-prone countries, through induction briefings to newly appointed Resident Coordinators and agency representatives, and in the forum of regional meetings of Resident Coordinators and agencies representatives;
- 2) OCHA enter into agreements with other UN agencies providing for the training and immediate release of agency personnel as members of UNDAC missions;
- 3) OCHA intensify its efforts to expand the number of UNDAC members in Latin America;
- 4) any country providing military and civil defense assets in response to a request from OCHA, also ensure that an officer is made available to the MCDU to perform liaison duties for the duration of the deployment of such assets.

2 THE REHABILITATION PHASE

Programmes

- ❑ National sector programmes designed for the rehabilitation phase are not always responsive to the needs and priorities as perceived at the level of districts, municipalities and communities. In general, furthermore, municipalities are not given the opportunity to participate in the preparation of sector reconstruction programmes formulated centrally.
- ❑ The Mission accordingly:
 - 1) UNDP/ERD, OCHA, UNICEF and PAHO/WHO should co-operate with ECLAC in the revision of its existing assessment methodology to fine-tune the analysis on social sectors and human factors, thus enhancing the UN advocacy role on their behalf;
 - 2) endorses the steps taken by the Resident Coordinators and the DMTs in Honduras and Nicaragua to outpost programme staff with a view to providing a platform and voice to municipalities and communities in negotiating and deciding on programmes and priorities, as well as to assist them in the formulation of projects;

- 3) recommends that such approaches to decentralised programming be tried on an experimental basis, to supplement conventional programming at the national level, in countries where the central authorities responsible for the coordination of external assistance are in agreement with this approach;
- 4) further recommends that, when appropriate, the decentralised approach to programming provide a basis for locally negotiated fund-raising initiatives and be reflected in the sectoral presentation of any inter-agency appeals issued by OCHA in support of the DMT;
- 5) where deemed appropriate by the resident coordinator, UNDP/ERD may deploy to the DMT, initially in tandem with the UNDAC team, a specialist in early recovery and rehabilitation programming, who will assist the Country Team in the assessments for and design of short- to medium-term recovery activities; ERD should be charged with identifying such specialists, in cooperation with OCHA, and developing mechanisms with OCHA for their deployment as adjuncts to UNDAC teams.

On the Transitional Appeal

- The Inter-Agency Transitional Appeal represented an attempt to capture those elements of the rehabilitation and recovery process that UN system agencies are well-positioned to contribute to. In the main, appealing agencies are those already engaged in the relief operations in the region, projecting requirements over a six-month period in an effort to consolidate the work that has commenced.
- The Mission believes that it is essential to resolve the issue of ownership of the appeal process, so that appeals are perceived by all concerned to have the active backing of the national government. To this end, it is recommended that:
 - 1) as soon as possible following the life-saving phase of an emergency, a Flash Appeal be launched by OCHA in support of the main emergency and relief actors (in the Central American case WFP, PAHO/WHO, UNICEF and UNDP). Normally, this appeal would be for resources urgently needed by these organizations and often individually negotiated on the basis of the first in-country assessments of needs in the immediate aftermath of the disaster;
 - 2) drawing upon the experiences of the CAP process, the Appeal be updated at an appropriate time, which might be six to eight weeks after the disaster, allowing sufficient time for consultations with the government, bilateral donors and NGOs to provide an analysis of the situation and to prepare a structured rehabilitation programme, highlighting its linkages with existing development goals;
 - 3) programme identification take into account the individual government's views on the timing of the transition, interventions that are underway or planned

under bilateral arrangements, and in the non-governmental sector, as well as include urgent rehabilitation projects that can be government-executed;

- 4) consideration be given to accommodating participatory decentralised programming approaches;
- 5) the Appeal update be formally launched in the capitals of the countries concerned at the same time as in Geneva;
- 6) appropriate technical support, as well as prior training in the area of appeal format and process, be provided to Resident Coordinators to assist in the preparation of the update of the Appeal.

3 DISASTER REDUCTION AND MITIGATION

- ❑ Hurricane Mitch was a forceful reminder that the countries of Central America are at perpetual risk from an array of natural disasters and that preparedness and mitigation measures were too limited, restricted to some sectors and professionals. It is therefore essential that preparedness at all levels is enhanced, on the one hand, and that longer-term programmes address the root causes that led to Hurricane Mitch having such devastating impacts, on the other.
- ❑ The Mission recommends the following:

On Preparedness

- 1) relevant members of UN Country Teams, with the support of respective UN Headquarters, to strengthen the civil defence structures, with special emphasis on local and municipal emergency committees in order to build capacity in communities in high-risk areas, addressing *inter alia* community awareness, organisation and training and information management. Such programmes are to be comprehensive and encompass all involved actors, i.e., scientific and research institutions;
- 2) the UN Country Teams, with the support of OCHA and UNDP/ERD, maintain and improve the information management devices set-up during Mitch, with more analytical capacity;
- 3) the Resident Coordinators, with the support of UNDP/ERD and relevant agency headquarters:
 - i) should maintain a permanent DMT working group, made up of a cadre of trained national and international officers, tasked with ongoing monitoring of risks of natural or other disasters and developing appropriate preparedness plans for likely disaster events;

- ii) DMTs should be called together whenever required, such as when early warnings of an approaching hurricane are sounded, to update contingency plans for the eventuality of a disaster occurring.

On Disaster Prevention and Mitigation

- 1) under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator, the DMT should expand its role to mainstream disaster reduction into all country programming;
- 2) the UN Country Teams to identify suitable planning authorities, line ministries, sectoral authorities and the civil defence structures in order to promote the consideration of disaster reduction issues as part of sustainable human development efforts;
- 3) the UN Country Teams programmes to primarily focus on highly vulnerable areas such as marginal urban and rural communities, where almost all victims of this hurricane and previous disasters live. Their living conditions, lack of access to education, health and sustainable livelihoods, if not addressed, will keep them at high risk when a disaster strikes again;
- 4) in preparation for the Stockholm Consultative Group Meeting in May, the UN Country Teams should:
 - i) advocate for the explicit inclusion of disaster reduction in the programmes, based on 'a better chance of obtaining financing for sustainable projects';
 - ii) promote wide consultation of these programmes with the municipal and local authorities and the civil society;
 - iii) continue focusing on priority social sectors seeking further funding, including direct UN HQs financial support; for, *inter alia*, the following priorities:
 - a) ensuring that displaced children and children in communities that have lost infrastructure, equipment and material, have access to quality education;
 - b) to rehabilitate health and sanitation services, monitor health and nutrition trends and reduce health hazards in order to minimise impact in terms of morbidity/mortality; and
 - c) to provide psychosocial support to children and women and most affected groups.
- 5) The UN Country Team and relevant Headquarters should strongly support efforts in addressing watershed and river basin management together with global environment issues on a regional basis.