

March 15, 1995

TO: Dr. Marie Andree Diouf  
Country Representative  
Pan American Health Organization  
Port-au-Prince, Haiti

FROM: Josephine Malilay, Ph.D.

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SUBJECT: Mortality associated with Tropical Storm Gordon in  
Haiti: a summary of preliminary findings

The following summarizes preliminary results of a field investigation on February 26-March 15, 1995 concerning mortality related to Tropical Storm Gordon in Haiti during November 13-14, 1994.

As you know, the Republic of Haiti experienced the effects of Tropical Storm Gordon, a complex weather system that passed across the western Caribbean Sea, Jamaica, Cuba, Florida, and the southwestern Atlantic. Initial reports by PAHO estimated that 1.5 million people were affected by the storm, with over 8,000 homeless families in inaccessible areas. Mortality was estimated at 1,122 persons, primarily among inhabitants of the Departments of the West and Southeast. The impact of Gordon in Haiti was especially noteworthy: 1) deaths occurred in spite of current forecasting, warning, evacuation, and sheltering measures for hurricanes; 2) deaths occurred in a country located in the periphery of the storm; and 3) deaths may have been due to environmental degradation, resulting from deforestation and erosion that facilitate water runoff, a major problem in recent years.

Accordingly, we conducted a community survey in conjunction with the National Red Cross Society of Haiti (HCR). The specific objectives were 1) to describe the causes of mortality related to the tropical storm and 2) to recommend prevention strategies at the community level for future disasters.

Initial activities consisted of meetings with officials from the HCR, regional government officials in selected disaster zones, and disaster-affected residents. Site visits were also made to four severely affected areas--Cite Soleil, Leogane, Kenscoff, and Jacmel. Under the auspices of the HCR, we conducted a community survey in three selected communes: 1) Jacmel, Department of the Southeast; 2) Leogane, Department of the West; and 3) Kenscoff, Department of the West. Selection of these communes was based on results of initial surveys of deaths counts and needs assessments conducted by the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), the Haiti/Gordon/Comite d'Urgence, and topographical features of these areas.