

## CHAPTER IV

### LESSONS FROM THE EXPERIENCE. A BROAD THEORY OF THE FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT VIS-A-VIS EXTERNAL AS- SISTANCE GROUPS IN AN EMERGENCY SITUATION.

240. All disaster situations generate a certain amount of controversy. This is inevitable, considering that urgent action in the face of a complex, pressure-ridden situation can easily result in confusion, contradiction and conflict.

#### *The role of the government*

241. Let us first point out that there was much less controversy about Guatemala than in other emergencies. It is generally agreed that the Government faced the situation effectively, and in general terms, successfully carried out its assessment and coordination roles. The UN Disaster Relief Coordinator himself remarked in his report to the Secretary-General following his visit to Guatemala on «the high competence of the professional staff of the Ministries both in taking immediate relief measures and in planning for the future».

242. The role of the government was vital, and it is clear that however highly-developed the infrastructure of external assistance groups or voluntary agencies may have been, none of them, working jointly or in isolation, could have done what the Government infrastructure did for its people in this disaster.

243. We consider that the remarkable and independent response of the Government of a small and poor republic is a reflection of a historical trend. This trend is itself a function of the development process we are all trying to foster.

244. Unlike twenty years ago, governments of developing countries today are much less receptive to external orientation on how they should run their own affairs — and this is as it should be. In the context of UNDP's own technical assistance, it is well known that the old concept of expert generalists slowly guiding government institutions forward is dying fast. Governments are increasingly more sophisticated, and tend to be receptive only to high-level or highly-specialized expertise. In countries where this is not yet the case, it will surely be so in coming years.

245. This is no less true in the case of emergency assistance. In the Resident Representative's first meeting after the earthquake with the Minister of Defense and the Emergency Committee, he was told in no uncertain terms that the Government would specify what assistance was wanted.

246. This position was reflected in the UNDRO/UNDP reports to UNDRO Headquarters. The United Nations family certainly had a considerable amount of technical expertise on hand for assessing emergency needs, notably in the health sector, where urgent needs were continuously being identified. But at no time did we or our experts attempt to double guess the Government nor the Emergency Committee. All our views on requirements were consulted with the Emergency Committee and presented as our advice to the Government on the evaluation or handling of specific aspects of disaster relief.

247. There are still countries in the world where governments may not be fully-equipped to cope with disasters and may accept external coordination of relief efforts. This will probably be increasingly the exception in the coming years. Certainly, in the two major disasters following the Guatemala earthquake, neither the Chinese nor the Philippine governments accepted external assistance, much less any form of external coordination of the relief effort.

The conclusion we draw from this discussion is the following:

*The independent and timely action in the face of massive disaster by the Government of Guatemala, a small and poor country, is a reflection of a historical trend, whereby countries as they develop assume more independent and effective positions in the management of their internal affairs, and disaster relief. Therefore all external assistance groups, and notably the United Nations family, should bear in mind that, as a rule, and increasingly so in the future, disaster relief will have to follow the orientation and coordination of the local Government, and any external coordination effort must be geared to supplement and strengthen the action of the Government as coordinator.*

#### *The Phases of Disaster Relief: Prevention*

248. Prevention involves activities that would seek to ensure that the occurrence of natural phenomena do not result in disasters. This is discussed in Chapter III. It was not, however, a significant element in the response to the 1976 earthquake in Guatemala.

249. Before 4 February 1976, the Emergency Committee was more engaged in preparedness for, or prevention of, recurrent types of emergencies, such as floods or, to some extent, volcanic activity.

250. There was no developed methodology nor infrastructure at other levels of preparedness for prevention, such as physical or regional planning (the state of the art was two volumes in the 1975-1979 Plan on how to approach the problem of regional planning and a preliminary, IDB-assisted study on the regional development of the Western Highlands).

251. Neither was there any institutional mechanism for formulating housing policy (such as a Ministry or Vice-Ministry of Housing), and outside the capital (where application itself is limited), zoning regulations or building standards are only marginally applied, if at all.

252. Thus, preparedness in terms of effective action for prevention of an earthquake-related disaster does not enter into the discussion of any measures taken by the Government prior to the earthquake of 4 February 1976.

253. This is in any case an extremely complex and difficult field. It may be noted that even a specialist consultant's report on predisaster preparedness before the earthquake in fact makes no concrete action recommendations for such an eventuality.

#### *The Phases of Disaster Relief: Preparedness*

254. The concept of preparedness involves the capacity of Government and assistance institutions effectively to provide relief when disaster strikes and to organize themselves for this purpose.

255. It is evident that the Government was not prepared (as few Governments would be) to meet a disaster of the magnitude of the earthquake of 4 February 1976. On the other hand, the Government showed itself to be capable of organizing itself and took all steps to strengthen its weaker areas as the relief effort developed. This type of organizational efficiency compensated for the initial difficulties faced by the government.

256. As far as the Resident Representative is concerned, what he can do in terms of disaster preparedness is quite limited. We propose to examine those limitations, considering firstly that the Government is primarily responsible for preparedness, and also the technical limitations that may impede full preparedness on the part of the Resident Representative.

#### *The role of UNDRO Headquarters and the UNDP Resident Representative in terms of disaster preparedness*

257. The General Assembly resolution creating UNDRO indicates that it should

- (a) Establish and maintain the closest cooperation with all organizations concerned and to make all feasible advance

*arrangements with them for the purpose of ensuring the most effective assistance».*

258. UNDRO has, in fact, a world-wide network of contacts that can be used urgently to mobilize assistance in the face of any disaster situation that may arise.

259. At the country level, however, the Resident Representative as UNDRO's field representative, must undertake all action for preparedness on its behalf.

260. It must be recalled, to start with, that the UNDP Resident Representative is not a specialist in disaster relief. This will affect any possibilities or capacity he may have to advise or influence the Government as far as disaster preparedness is concerned, noting that we have already said that most governments are very sensitive and receptive only to specialist advice.

261. The fact that emergency relief usually forms part of an integrated national civil defence network makes governments even more sensitive to any outside suggestions in this area. This explains some communications problems an UNDRO consultant in Guatemala had before the earthquake with the Government when he began a three month mission on disaster prevention and relief.

262. We will now discuss, in the context of disaster preparedness, the possible role of the UNDP Resident Representative and the inputs he may need from UNDRO.

263. The August 1975 instruction to Resident Representatives with regard to Pre-Disaster Planning and Disaster Relief indicates that UNDRO will attempt «to define a strategy for action at the country level according to the disaster risks involved and other pertinent factors», in consultation with the Resident Representative and various government agencies.

264. This is certainly a priority activity that UNDRO must undertake, specially in disaster-prone areas. Such an exercise, technically directed by and originating from UNDRO Headquart-

ers would provide the UNDP Resident Representative with the necessary specialist orientation to advise and coordinate with the Government in the most efficient way in the area of disaster preparedness.

265. Coincidentally, in the case of Guatemala UNDRO had fielded a consultant for three months before the earthquake, to test the best approach to be followed in the design of «country plans». There are certain points, however, that external consultants not fully familiar with the UN system must bear in mind, in terms of inputs the Resident Representative needs for disaster preparedness, and we present our recommendations on this subject.

266. We consider, that UNDRO should, in addition to whatever information it keeps now, maintain complete and updated maps and files on each country in the world, specially the disaster-prone areas. This should include:

- (a) Maps showing climate, topography and roads, as well as urban centres;
- (b) Data on airports, seaports and other access facilities;
- (c) Data on communications and types of facilities available (satellite, microwave, etc.);
- (d) General socio-economic data, notably on diet, health and education disaggregated to the extent possible by regions.

267. This information may be secured from the Resident Representative through specific requests by UNDRO, with guidelines on the general purposes of the information requested and the general approach to be followed in consultations with Government officials. For example, there are useful technical data on ports (draughts, berths, type of loading/unloading facilities, traffic, and capacity), which many non-specialist Resident Representatives would be unable to identify nor secure without technical guidance. This sort of exercise would be an excellent way for the Resident Representative to be familiar with information

relevant to disasters and for him to know what sort of data he should keep in mind, specially if periodic up-dating is requested by UNDRO.

268. UNDRO may also orient the Resident Representative on how to organize the information he supplies, so the field representative knows exactly what information UNDRO Headquarters has on the country and how it is arranged.

269. UNDRO should then issue guidelines to Resident Representatives along two levels:

- (a) On the basis of the specific country-information supplied, UNDRO should indicate what sort of data with relation to infrastructure, communication and weather forecasts is expected of the Resident Representative after disaster strikes (e.g. what main roads are blocked, what port facilities operational, communications channels open by types previously identified, if cold front approaching or rains, etc.);
- (b) UNDRO should also issue (as it has done to a limited extent) technical reports on the characteristics of various types of disasters, with special notes to Resident Representatives on how a specific type of disaster may relate to their country of assignment, and what it may imply in terms of the various action alternatives the Resident Representative must be specially prepared for.

270. It would also be useful for UNDRO to provide a list of basic supplies required for most emergency situations, noting which are most relevant to the Resident Representative's country of assignment.

271. For example, from the standpoint of health, the list can be derived from likely disaster related occurrences: (a) antibiotics (Infections); (b) analgesics (pain); (c) anaesthetics (trauma/surgery); (d) vaccines (epidemics); (e) water purifiers (contamination); etc.

272. It is further recommended that, possibly in coordination with WHO, an international standard code or classification be drawn up for the emergency medical supplies listed above (and

of course others that would be identified), so that whatever the origin and destination of assistance, medical supplies can be readily identified on the basis of standard markings. This would prevent the confusion caused by labels in foreign languages and to be effective would presuppose that supplies are sorted and marked in the agreed-to code prior to shipment. This could even be the subject of an international convention, or from part of a broader convention on standards and classification. Experience of other agencies using such standardized systems, such as the International Red Cross, can be beneficial for this purpose.

273. The guidelines recommended here are probably the only way a Resident Representative can discuss on an adequate technical level any form of disaster preparedness with the Government. Furthermore, they can serve as the basis for general discussion with other members of the UN family and external assistance groups.

274. It should always be taken into account, however, that aside from limited technical discussions of the type described above, preparedness is still mainly a government function. The best the Resident Representative can do is maintain loose contacts with external assistance groups.

275. As far as his colleagues in the UN family are concerned, the Resident Representative can have a broad understanding with them on disaster preparedness and inform them of any relevant events and technical points. What is most important here, however, is not any formal arrangement but excellent contacts through day-to-day work, between the Resident Representative and local UN family representatives, and the creation by the Resident Representative of a climate of mutual respect that will enable representatives of UN family agencies readily to accept the Resident Representative's coordinating role should disaster strike.

276. We conclude, from this discussion:

*As the Resident Representative is not a specialist in disaster relief, to fulfil the requirements of preparedness, UNDRO*

*should provide the Resident Representative with the technical instruments required for him readily to identify broad needs in the face of different disaster situations. These instruments will also permit the Resident Representative to consult and coordinate on an appropriate technical level with the Government, as well as the United Nations Family and other agencies, matters relating to disaster preparedness.*

277. In the case of Guatemala, we were fortunate to have exceptionally-good technical inputs from UN Agencies and experts in various relevant fields who helped us immediately to clarify the characteristics of the disaster situation and advise the government on the types of relief supplies to be favoured. It was also useful that a number of the Resident Representative's staff were familiar with earthquakes.

*A note on the usefulness of UNDRO technical notes on the characteristics of various types of disasters*

278. In Guatemala, aside from providing him with a clear perspective on how the disaster situation could be faced in general terms, the Resident Representative's familiarity with earthquakes and their characteristics was helpful in taking key decisions with regard to UN personnel and orienting them on their own personal response.

279. In general, the Resident Representative was able to clarify the tendencies of this type of phenomenon to UN staff and note that it was quite unlikely that an earthquake of such a magnitude would be followed by another one of equal strength, and that in any case structures that had not been damaged by the first earthquake would probably resist any subsequent one of comparable intensity. This was the case with most of the residences of UN personnel. Aside from taking or advising elementary precautionary measures, the UNDP office took note of technical reports on subsequent tremors and what these could imply (although in fact no conclusions could be drawn, given the state of the art, on the likelihood of another earthquake of similar magnitude in the immediate future). In the future, when earthquake prediction

techniques are more developed, monitoring reports could be an action of the Resident Representative.

280. This fairly clear knowledge of the characteristics of the situation as it affected UN personnel was the basis for the decision not to evacuate personnel. It also permitted the Resident Representative clearly to explain the reasons for this decision to those members of the UN staff who were understandably unnerved by the dozens of tremors that were occurring daily, and to calm them to the extent possible.

281. The technical reports issued by UNDRO, thus serve a useful function for Resident Representatives to assess the measures and attitude to take in the face of a disaster, specially as these reports contain to some extent accounts of mechanisms adopted by other countries to face disaster situations. As these reports are fairly specialized, however, action, guidelines for Resident Representatives to supplement them may be useful.

#### *The Phases of Disaster Relief - Assessment*

282. We can identify two types of assessment in connexion with a disaster. The first relates to assessing the day-to-day situation to identify needs and programme the supply of relief assistance. The second involves a global assessment of the impact of the disaster, primarily of use in rehabilitation and reconstruction.

283. Both types of assessment are primarily the responsibility of the Government. This is legally established in Guatemala, as it is in most countries with a civil-defence mechanism, and is in line with the general theory espoused here.

284. The Resident Representative, as UNDRO's field representative, also has a role to play in the assessment, of needs. According to the General Assembly resolution creating UNDRO, one of the functions of the UN Disaster Relief Coordinator is,

«To assist the Government of the stricken country to assess its relief and other needs and to evaluate the priority of these needs».

285. We will now evaluate how this directive was met in the case of Guatemala. This is also explained in more detail in Chapter II.

*Assessment of day-to-day needs*

286. This assessment was carried out by the Emergency Committee's intelligence unit utilizing inputs from local authorities and specialized Government branches, notably the Ministry of Public Health, local authorities and the army.

287. The UN family had experts advising key government sectors, such as the Ministry of Public Health and the Directorate of Statistics, and these were very important technical contributions to assessment. PAHO/WHO advised and assisted not only on day-to-day relief action but also in the design of a basic health and sanitation emergency programme.

288. Following the instructions of the Resident Representative, UNDP experts also departed from their project terms of reference and assisted in their fields of competence in such vital fields as the assessment of water supply conditions and sources of water supply for the capital.

289. The US Disaster Area Survey Team provided excellent information that supplemented Government reports. To the extent that governments permit the assistance of independent, outside survey teams, this resource is of great value in a disaster situation.

290. Assessment is also seen in terms of the Resident Representative's important function of the Resident Representative's reports to UNDRO and his representation of Government requests. The standing instruction to Resident Representatives is:

«Continuing assessment and definition of the relief supplies, equipment and services to be requested from the international community through UNDRO is perhaps the most significant task to be carried out by a Resident Representative on behalf of UNDRO in a disaster emergency».

291. In this connexion, the following procedure was followed:

- (a) Requests of the Government were continually considered by the Resident Representative;
- (b) At the meetings with the UN family representatives, government requests were technically evaluated, and agency representatives advising different government bodies could present their own suggestions on priority needs;
- (c) Through permanent contacts with bilateral groups and voluntary agencies, their own assessment and needs were noted;
- (d) Following (b) and (c) above, any questions or doubts on requests were referred back to the Government. Also, any suggestions by our experts or from direct consultations with Government or other agencies on additional needs were also cleared with the emergency committee before the requests were put to UNDRO.

292. We would like to stress the importance of item (d) above. It indicates that the Resident Representative's position should be to advise the Government on any doubts or questions so these could be clarified, and not to double-guess them.

293. A case in point was the emergency situation created by the eruption of the Fuego Volcano in the last quarter of 1975. At that time, the newspapers carried disturbing accounts of the havoc supposedly being wrought by the volcano. Some government officials were already quoting the newspapers.

294. On the same day an UNDRO request for more details came in, the Resident Representative visited the affected area with his Senior Agricultural Advisor. Their inspection showed that damage was not in fact as serious as suggested by the newspaper accounts.

295. Although the Resident Representative's professional qualifications happened to include specialization in agricultural questions (having been Minister of Agriculture in his country and a senior FAO official), he did not report his views immediately. Rather, he ascertained the action taken by the Government so far

and requested the Government for an official evaluation through the Ministry of Agriculture.

296. In the meantime, the Government requested assistance from international agencies. The Resident Representative pointed out that he had visited the area and had requested an evaluation, and that it would be best to take no action before the results of this evaluation were known.

297. The Government eventually indicated that the situation could be readily controlled and that no external assistance would be required.

298. A request for an assessment, or for a clarification or reassessment in case of doubt, would seem to be a proper function of the Resident Representative, in keeping with the spirit of the General Assembly resolution of «assisting the Government to assess its relief and other needs».

299. However, it is evident that the Resident Representative cannot provide any assessment without consulting the government, and even in the case of disagreement, the Resident Representative must transmit the Government position faithfully. He also must be very careful regarding any comments on the government position, as there is in fact a matter of sovereignty here that cannot be taken lightly.

300. Is there, then, any broader role the Resident Representative may assume with regard to assessment? The General Assembly, in establishing UNDRO as an official channel or intermediary between recipient and donor governments, makes no provision other than that of «assisting the government in assessment».

301. We consider that this is a wise position. Any strengthening of UNDRO's assessment function should preferably involve strengthening the government's own assessment capability, *at the request or with the consent of the government.*

302. For example, if the government needs to strengthen its survey capability immediately, UNDRO may offer resources and

technical expertise to carry out the appropriate surveys through the existing government structure (e.g. the statistics agency).

303. We did this in a limited way in Guatemala through the advice provided by our experts in the statistics field. Subsequently, UNDRO approved funds for a survey of unmet needs. Unfortunately, neither the UNDRO consultant in the field at the time nor the group he proposed be contracted were specialists in organizing scientific surveys: the office sponsored an unsuccessful attempt to orient the group contracted through the advice of a UNDP specialist working with the statistic units of the Government. Because the group did not absorb this orientation the results of the survey were not useful.

304. This experience showed us that strengthening the government machinery (which has knowledge of the country and also has trained personnel) may have in fact been more productive in this situation. Aside from providing the government with more experience in the area of disaster-related census taking, it would have been cheaper than hiring a professional group specialized in this sort of activity.

305. Furthermore, in selecting the UNDRO team to assist the Resident Representative, it is preferable to choose permanent staff with suitable qualifications, who are knowledgeable both in the theoretical aspects of disaster preparedness and prevention, as well as in the practical elements of disaster relief, which involves mainly logistics, coordination and scientific data-gathering. This is very important for closely integrating relief efforts with the subsequent rehabilitation and reconstruction stages. There are also some disadvantages in hiring very short-term consultants (unless they advise on specific technical fields), as they may be interested in some cases in prolonging their stay beyond the emergency period.

306. A good procedure might be to field teams with permanent staff and temporary consultants whose contracts are provided for fixed periods that *cannot be renewed*. In the case services of UNDRO staff are required beyond a certain emergency period, the permanent staff member rather than the consultant should stay on.

*Assessment of the broad implications of the disaster*

307. As indicated previously, the Resident Representative instructed UNDP experts to depart from their project terms of reference for the period required and collaborate with their respective government counterparts in the urgent tasks at hand.

308. This liberated technical resources to assist the government in all aspects of the general evaluation of the disaster (see Chapters I and III).

309. Furthermore, the UNDP Programme Section monitored the assessments being carried out and kept abreast of the results of the evaluation. A major contribution in evaluation was the work of UNDP/UNOTC experts in the Planning Office and the Central Bank, who assisted in the preparation to the only existing global assessment of the disaster [25]).

310. This group also received the input of a UNDP-funded ECLA evaluation mission. Other sectors covered by UNDP-sponsored assistance involved expertise in the Ministry of Finance and in the Directorate of Statistics as well as in the field of housing and regional development.

311. The United Nations family also provided assistance in the assessment of the phenomenon through the work of UNESCO/CE-RESIS missions.

312. The technical expertise provided by the UN resulted in the production first of an ECLA (Mexico) evaluation of the earthquake and then of the Government report which is the most complete assessment made of the nature of the disaster and its social and economic implications, which was used by external groups and financing agencies.

313. The UN family is thus capable of contributing significantly to the broad assessment carried out by the Government following a disaster. This assumes that the appropriate expertise is on hand, which fortunately was the case, and it was fully utilized in Guatemala.

314. The instruction in force to UNDP Resident Representatives indicates that UNDRO's role can be the following:

«UNDRO can perform a useful function in the transitional period by assembling data on long-term requirements for the information of potential donors and United Nations agencies. It is at the reconstruction stage that many preventive measures against future disasters can be taken —e.g. as regards physical planning, zoning and building techniques— and UNDRO may be in a position to furnish guidance in respect of such measures».

316. This brings us back to the point raised earlier, of the importance that UNDRO assign suitably qualified permanent staff in these areas to assist the Resident Representative in disaster relief. Staff of this quality would be very helpful in gathering the data suggested as a possible UNDRO input for the reconstruction stage. We conclude, from this discussion:

*Assessment is a government function, and the most the Resident Representative can do as intermediary between requesting and donor government is to encourage assessment or re-evaluation in case of doubts, as part of the General Assembly mandate of assisting the government in assessing its relief and other needs. If the Government agrees, assistance in assessment by the United Nations family should be oriented mainly towards strengthening the government's own assessment capability. In terms of the broad assessment of the implications of the disaster, UNDRO can contribute significantly by assigning suitably qualified permanent technical staff to assist the Resident Representative in the disaster relief phase, and in data gathering for reconstruction, as well as general orientation of the disaster prevention aspects to be considered in the reconstruction stage.*

*The phases of disaster relief: Coordination*

317. Coordination is the harmonization of the action of various institutions and their respective inputs and programmes, on the basis of the assessment of priority needs.

318. In an emergency situation, this is the central and probably the most challenging task facing the Government.

319. The Emergency Committee of Guatemala, created by Executive Decree in 1971, is responsible for coordination of disaster relief as follows:

- «c. To plan and coordinate the utilization of all resources, both public and private, with the purpose of having the necessary means to face any emergency».
- «f. Centralize internal and external assistance, as well as that sent from other countries in similar cases».

320. We will not evaluate the Emergency Committee's coordination performance in detail here. In general, although it had no experience in facing a disaster of this magnitude, it is generally recognized that it was quite effective in undertaking this task. The fact that the President of the Emergency Committee is the Minister of Defence and that the General Coordinator of the Committee is a member of the Armed Forces general Staff was probably a main factor in determining the effectiveness of the Emergency Committee. The whole Army of Guatemala was mobilized to give assistance in this emergency, and in a disaster of this magnitude the Army is the only national organization that can cope with the requirements of the emergency situation. As we pointed out previously, no external group can match this type of resource.

321. It is our view, on the other hand, that for countries that may request this, UNDR0 could have in its staff specialists in the various tasks of assessment and coordination, that could be fielded to advise the Government on how best to organize specific aspects of these tasks.

322. This could include advice on organization, and suggestions on the type of permanent information the coordinating agent of the Government in a disaster should continually release to the international agencies when disaster strikes, on the basis of past experience of information requirements of these groups. It could also involve technical strengthening of survey capability, as well as advice on the major world voluntary agencies that may participate in disaster relief, their characteristics and resources.

323. It has been remarked that some voluntary agencies operated outside the Government relief network. This was possible in Guatemala. However, taking into account that the Government has the final authority on matters of any external action within its territory, it is most advantageous for voluntary agencies, and for the general relief effort, to coordinate with the Government in a disaster situation. It is also to the general interest to attempt to strengthen the government coordinating function, and cooperate with the government by providing all information on resources, technical capabilities for disaster relief, etc.

324. The only non-governmental organization with a clear, legal responsibility for disaster relief in Guatemala apart from the Government is the National Red Cross. There is thus plenty of room for voluntary agencies to initiate consultations with governments on the types of assistance they can offer, to ensure coordinated action in a disaster, and UNDRO could internationally encourage this sort of *rapprochement*.

#### *The role of UNDRO in coordination*

325. The General Assembly resolution creating the office of the Disaster Relief Coordinator indicates that he has the following authority on behalf of the Secretary-General with regard to coordination:

- «(a) To establish and maintain the closest cooperation with all organizations concerned and to make all feasible advance arrangements with them for the purpose of ensuring the most effective assistance;
- «(b) To mobilize, direct and coordinate the relief activities of the various organizations of the United Nations system in response to a request for disaster assistance from a stricken State;
- «(c) To co-ordinate United Nations assistance with assistance given by intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, in particular by the International Red Cross;
- «(e) To assist the Government of the stricken country to assess its relief and other needs and to evaluate the priority of

those needs, to disseminate that information to prospective donors and others concerned, and to serve as a clearing-house for assistance extended or planned by all sources of external aid».

How was this mandate met in Guatemala?

326. The general response of the UNDP office as UNDRO's representative in the field is described in Chapter II. Summing up in relation to coordination, we may note the following:

327. With regard to point (a) above, constant contact was maintained, in the first place with the Emergency Committee and with key Government agencies in the relief operation such as the Ministry of Public Health. The Resident Representative personally maintained consultations with bilateral donors and in some cases even advised them on possible uses for their resources. Lastly, there was permanent contact with voluntary agencies. Further below we will discuss the UN-sponsored inter-agency coordination meetings.

328. With respect to item (b), the Resident Representative held meetings (daily and then twice a week) with UN family representatives as well as permanent individual consultations with UN officers engaged in various tasks in the emergency phase. These meetings, also cited in the discussion on assessment above, provided action guidelines, both in terms of action by the UN family as well as recommendations we would make to the Government and to UNDRO Headquarters. The mobilization of UN resources and its direction by the UNDP Resident Representative has also been described in Chapters II and III.

329. With regard to point (c), we have mentioned that daily contact was maintained with voluntary agencies. Coordination with multilateral assistance groups was maintained at another level (oriented towards reconstruction), as except perhaps for the Organization of American States, these were not engaged in disaster relief. In the case of voluntary agencies, coordination was so close that some assistance funds channelled through UNDRO were provided to supplement the assistance efforts of these groups, with the approval of the government.

330. This last point, as well as point (e), which cites the «clearing-house» function of UNDRO have raised some controversial points regarding the UNDRO/UNDP role in response to the disaster, which we discuss in the next section.

*The General Assembly mandate and the possibility for integrated UNDRO coordination at the field level*

331. The «clearing-house» function of UNDRO has generally been interpreted, to our minds rightly, to refer to the duty of UNDRO at the international level to disseminate information on needs as relayed by the Resident Representative or from direct requests by the Government, and to note the contributions being provided by all sources for disaster relief.

332. The General Assembly resolution requires UNDRO, and consequently the UNDP Resident Representative as its field representative, to coordinate *with* agencies involved in the relief efforts. It makes no reference to coordinating their activities, in the sense of providing action guidelines to them at the field level.

333. A report by a major assistance donor [7], suggests that because the UNDP/UNDRO office did not perform an integrated coordination function at the field level it did not fulfil its mandate.

334. This is a position we cannot accept. We have indicated point by point above how the actions taken by UNDP Guatemala as UNDRO's field representative followed the guidelines of the General Assembly mandate. We find that integrated field coordination, aside from the resource limitations which do not make it possible for the UN to assume this function at the present time, may in fact go against the spirit of the mandate — which is certainly to assist the government in discharging its responsibilities, and not for the UN to assume some of the government responsibilities as its own.

335. Is there a place at all for UNDRO integrated coordination at the field level? We consider that there may be, but only under very restricted circumstances.

336. The first condition is that the UN General Assembly must explicitly recognize the possibility of this function in specific circumstances and expand UNDRO's mandate accordingly.

337. The second condition and the specific circumstance we refer to is that the Government of the afflicted country recognizes the limitations of its capability for responding to the disaster, that massive action by UNDRO to strengthen this capability will be insufficient, and consequently *requests* that UNDRO undertake this broad field coordination function.

338. The third condition is that private and voluntary agencies, as well as bilateral assistance groups accept in practice that UNDRO will have integrated coordinating functions in the field.

339. The fourth and last condition is that the appropriate technical and financial resources be made available for this purpose.

340. It may be noted that even if the first, third and fourth conditions are present, the second condition, given the current historical situation, implies that UNDRO will need to undertake integrated field coordination in only a limited number of cases, and that these cases will become rarer as countries develop. Perhaps the possibility of integrated field coordination may be accepted for UNDRO, but as a reserve capability to be applied only in the special situation that the second condition is met (granted that the other three conditions would be previously accepted).

341. However, it should be clear at all times that not undertaking an integrated coordination function at the field level does not mean that UNDRO is not fulfilling its mandate. The General Assembly mandate does not include imposing on a government a parallel coordination mechanism to its own.

*The possibility of coordination mechanisms to supplement the Government network*

342. Our position with regard to assessment, and now with regard to coordination is that these are primarily government

functions, and that UNDRO efforts should be geared towards strengthening the government capability in these areas following a disaster, rather than in creating an independent structure of our own.

343. With the agreement of the government, however, the United Nations may sponsor some global coordination activities, such as the weekly coordination meetings initiated in February 1976 of voluntary agencies and bilateral groups. These meetings were carried out until the emergency phase ended.

344. When the Reconstruction Committee was founded, its Executive Director informed the Resident Representative that an International Coordination Unit was being formed. Thus, the Resident Representative was told, the UN-sponsored coordination meetings would no longer be necessary for the rehabilitation and reconstruction stages, as the Reconstruction Committee would take care of all coordination tasks. These meetings did not end during the emergency period as some quarters have implied, and the UN did not abandon any coordination responsibility it had assumed with the government's agreement, with respect to emergency operations.

345. It should be noted that these meetings only scratch the surface of the needs for coordination, as they provide only summaries of what the different groups are doing and the needs that they identify. Furthermore, it is difficult to obtain the cooperation of all groups, and in the later meetings a number of major donor agencies were not present.

346. The information requirements for coordination are certainly much more extensive, and the idea (not realized) of a major bilateral donor of bringing in a computer to process data reflects the type of capability that is in fact required. Even with the computer, there is still no certainty that all groups would cooperate, in which case data inputs would be insufficient.

347. The suggestion has been made that the UNDP office could have served as a focal point for coordination, by establishing a coordination centre which could supply information on needs and

on activities by different entities on a daily basis. One interpretation of this concept is that the Government coordinating agency would have one point of contact with international assistance groups, through the United Nations coordinating office that was proposed. Presumably, the government coordinating authority would then not be burdened with visits from so many external groups.

348. In the case of Guatemala, there were no resources for the United Nations to do this. It may also be noted that the UNDP offices were closed because of damage to the buildings where they are located, and operations were carried out through a communications centre in tents (where communications facilities were provided to certain voluntary agencies), an office in one of the project counterpart institutions, and in the residence of the Resident Representative. This would have made the establishment of a centre of this sort quite difficult.

349. More important, however, is the question of how the Government is to interpret such a facility. Surely it is unlikely that the local government nor many donors would necessarily accept the UN as main contact point between external donors and the national coordinating authority. This brings us back to the point of the four conditions for integrated coordination by UNDRO which we raised earlier. It would seem preferable, as recommended earlier in this paper, that UNDRO at the preparedness stage, advise the government on the information requirements of external assistance groups during a disaster as well as how to organize a mechanism for coordination. UNDRO could also assign resources to strengthen the government's own coordination mechanism (money to line personnel and technical expertise) along these lines, during the emergency phase of serious disasters, if the government agrees.

350. It must be stressed once more, that the General Assembly mandate explicitly states the role of UNDRO in strengthening the government function at the field level, and not that UNDRO should assume the government's coordinating role in the field. We do not see how UNDRO/UNDP's non-intervention in global coordination in the field except in a limited way (such as through the UN-sponsored coordination meetings in which the government participated) can be interpreted as a non-fulfilment of that mandate.