

RESTRICTED

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PROGRESS REPORT ON THE OECS SECRETARIAT DISASTER MANAGEMENT

The Authority is invited to note the attached Paper which attempts to give an up date on progress made in structuring a framework in which the OECS Secretariat, using its own resources, can carry out its role in the regional system of Disaster Management.

THE SETTING UP OF A DISASTER MANAGEMENT UNIT IN THE OECS SECRETARIAT

INTRODUCTION:

Disaster Management in the OECS sub-region is an area which deserves high priority attention.

This is largely because the islands which make up this sub-region are prone to disasters of sometimes quite staggering magnitude such as that wrought by hurricanes (Janet in 1955, David in 1979, Allen in 1980, and Hugo in 1989); volcanic eruptions (Martinique in 1902 Guadeloupe in 1976 and St. Vincent in 1979) or the less forceful but equally disruptive effects of flooding, drought and landslides.

Man made disasters also affect the region with increasing regularity and threaten to spoil the pristine waters of sea, river and lake, change the topography and even climatic conditions. The incautious use of chemicals in agriculture, the felling of forests, and the removal of sandy beaches affect both land and marine resources, disrupt the pattern of life for man and animals and threaten the sustainability of life itself.

Considering that the economies of the countries of the sub-region depend largely on natural resources and the environment (agriculture and tourism) for their gross domestic product (GDP) it is only natural that there should be keen interest in preventing disasters where possible, in reducing their effects and in managing the responses to disasters, efficiently and effectively, by whatever means available.

A disaster is an event which overwhelms the response capacity of the affected country at the time of the disaster. The response to such a disaster supposes a vast mobilization of human, technical and material resources. Further, a disaster demands that extraordinary measures are taken to preserve life, limb and property. It is these facts which have led the governments of the OECS sub-region to take action to ensure that mechanisms at all levels - community, national, sub-regional and regional - are put in place.

BACKGROUND:

The countries of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) spread in an arc from Grenada at latitude 12 degrees north to the British Virgin Islands near Puerto Rico at 18 degrees north, which puts them directly in the path of hurricanes spawned in the Atlantic. The islands are formed from the tops of submerged volcanoes uplifted millenniums ago but which still pose a threat in terms of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tsunamis.

The size and resources of each island are such that a country affected by a disaster will face insuperable problems without regional and international assistance. In such a case, the mobilisation and co-ordinated use of all local, national and regional resources should be resorted to automatically.

At present, the sub-region depends on several external sources to respond in times of disaster. These are:

Formal Response Mechanisms:

Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA)

Regional Security System (RSS)

Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)

Informal Response Mechanisms:

International Funding Agencies

Foreign governments

Currently, the immediate response will come from the affected country. The regional responder will be the Regional Security System, using its own resources and mobilizing regional military resources. CDERA will organise the international assistance which will constitute the third response.

However, in this scenario, a response capacity is bypassed: the OECS Secretariat and its specialised Units.

DISASTER RESPONSE RESOURCES OF THE SECRETARIAT:

Several of the Units of the Secretariat have a direct role to play in disaster response and mitigation. However, a look at recent past experiences shows that while the Secretariat was expected to carry out certain functions in times of disaster, the responses, though admirable, had been done in the absence of a proper framework of disaster management. Among the various units of the Secretariat, some may be extremely useful in disaster response, and it would be a waste of both technical and human resources to ignore this potential.

ECDS: drug supplies assessment
 supplies management (SUMA)
 technical expertise

NRMU: immediate post disaster environmental assessment
risk mapping (mitigation)

Fisheries Unit:
search and rescue
post disaster assessment
coastal risk mapping

ADCU: post disaster assessment
risk mapping

INFONET: collection and diffusion of all information per-
taining to disaster preparedness and response

ECDP: technical expertise
training of other units
mobilisation of health resources
(see Annex 1)

AERADIO: radio communications

A workshop held in May 1993 to discuss the role of the Secretariat and its Units in disaster management highlighted the necessity for a framework to allow them to systematise these response activities which they will be inevitably called upon to do. Also, in the light of the United Nations International Decade of Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) the time was right to promote better preventative and mitigative actions.

At the 22nd Meeting of the Authority of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) in June 1993, the Heads of Government agreed that there should be a process of regularising the participation of the OECS Secretariat in disaster management. The Communication/Policy Officer and Technical Officer in charge of Disaster Management was given the responsibility of carrying out this process.

Another meeting was held in February 1994, which brought together the heads of OECS units. During this meeting, the participants concurred that the OECS sub-region should make full use of its own disaster preparedness and response capacity. The roles of the Units in this approach were outlined. The meeting was followed by visits by the technical officer and the disaster expert to each Unit individually to discuss development of each Unit's potential capacities into a set of activities and actions.

PROPOSED DISASTER RESPONSE FRAMEWORK: (see Annex 2)

In cases of disaster, the Director General will mobilise the Heads of designated Units located in Saint Lucia (ECDS, ECDP, INFONET and NRMU) to constitute around him a Disaster Management Group.

Following pre-established and tested procedures, this Group will mobilise and manage appropriate resources pertaining to the OECS Secretariat, while remaining in permanent contact with the affected country and other regional or international response agencies (CDERA, RSS, PAHO...).

PROPOSED STEPS TOWARDS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SYSTEM:

1. Individual consultation with concerned units.
Status: partially completed by the Communication/Policy Officer and the Director of ECDP.
2. Setting up of a Disaster Management Group.
Status: This should be completed before the 1994 hurricane season.
3. Development of Internal Mobilisation Procedures.
Status: To be initiated by the Disaster Management Group and completed by June 1995.
4. Development of Disaster Response Plans by each pertinent unit.
Status: To be completed by June 1995.

PROPOSED TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT:

1. Development Phase: the ECDP will provide technical and financial support for setting up the DMG, for training, planning and development of procedures
2. Maintenance Phase: the ECDP will assist in maintaining the system (planning and training). Since the project ends in July 1996, provisions should be made to ensure the continuation of these activities.
3. Intervention Phase: in cases of disaster, the mobilisation of OECS Secretariat's resources to the affected country will require contingency funding from specific donor sources (for example, PAHO funding for the mobilisation of Medical Disaster Rescue Teams).

ANNEX 1

EASTERN CARIBBEAN DISASTER PROJECT **A Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation Project for OECS**

The Eastern Caribbean Disaster Project (ECDP) is a joint project between OECS, the Pan American Health Organization and the French Co-operation.

This project is managed by PAHO in co-operation with OECS Ministries of Health, National Rescue Services, National Disaster Committees, Red Cross Societies and Regional Universities.

This project was developed in order to assist OECS countries in the setting up of a specific disaster response organization, mainly for the health sector, adapted to regional realities such as

- small population
- limited resources
- difficulties of communications
- insularity
- limited health facilities

The ECDP uses a two-level approach to reach its goals :

- a national multi-sectoral approach for
 - * the identification of risks and existing resources
 - * the implementation of National Mass Casualty Management System
 - * the development of institutionalised training in Emergency and Disaster Management
 - * the development of mitigation measures for critical structures (hospitals, command centres..)
- a regional approach for the development of :
 - * inter island mutual assistance agreements
 - * inter island radiocommunication network
 - * inter university diploma in Emergency and Disaster Medicine
 - * emergency care protocols
 - * regional medical disaster response team

The project office, located on the premises of the OECS Secretariat in Saint Lucia, will also take part in the setting-up of the OECS Secretariat Disaster Management Group.

OECS SECRETARIAT DISASTER RESPONSE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

