

IDNDR Awareness Drive in the Caribbean

Hurricane Hugo has stressed again the need, and the potential, for mitigation measures in order to reduce loss of life and material damage caused by natural disasters.

Within the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR), to commence on 1 January 1990, the creation of a positive public awareness perception about the real potential for disaster mitigation and education as to the concrete possibilities for self-protection through preparedness represent priority tasks.

The period immediately after a disaster is considered as particularly propitious for awareness programmes; the actual experience of a disaster situation will increase comprehension for the concept of preparedness in such a way that concrete positive effects could be expected with regard to reconstruction - i.e., efforts towards hurricane resistant construction of low-cost housing.

UNDRO, in co-operation with the Pan Caribbean Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Programme (PCDPPP) is, therefore executing an awareness drive in the Caribbean region affected by Hurricane Hugo, combining information on practical ways and means for disaster prepar-



PAHO

Hurricane damage in the Caribbean

edness with a promotion drive for the IDNDR's goals and objectives in general.

cialists to sensitize them to their own role within disaster preparedness; and

The project will comprise:

- the production of a video documentary to publicize hazards and the IDNDR;

- the development of a media-kit and its distribution during a workshop for regional media spe-

- the development of a public lecture kit for use by technical specialists and members of IDNDR National Committees.

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PCDPPP Activities (Hurricane Hugo)

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to St. Kitts/Nevis, to improve the national disaster plan. This led to allocation of additional staff and increased resources for the national emergency system. A month-long public education programme was also carried out with the strong personal endorsement of the Prime Minister. Though in an embryonic state, the emergency system and network provided a focal point for warnings, mobilization, shelter management, damage assessment, the determination of emergency needs and the co-ordination of emergency assistance.

On the regional front in 1988 and 1989, the PCDPPP provided technical support and assistance to Barbados-based missions and resource agencies in order to draft guidelines for the collaboration of international and regional agencies responsible for responding to disasters in the eastern Caribbean. The UNDP/UNDRO Resident Representative in Barbados was able to use these guidelines in his co-ordinating role.

Regional meetings to pre-plan responses to the needs of affected countries contributed significantly to the timeliness and appropriateness of emergency response and should be institutionalized in other disaster-prone regions.

Telecommunications

Since the inception of the regional disaster programme, it has been recognized that the regular telecommunications systems of the region are highly vulnerable and

likely breakdown in time of disaster. With the support of USAID/OFDA and CIDA, the PCDPPP has devoted considerable time and equipment towards the establishment of alternate/standby communications systems within and among stricken islands and other Member States.

The emergency communication system established by PCDPPP was heavily utilized and indeed became somewhat congested. It was used to obtain situation reports from within countries and to maintain operational contact throughout the PCDPPP disaster network. The rapid and appropriate response of regional assistance must be attributed, in part, to the regular flow of information through the system.

PCDPPP's telecommunications equipment, placed in regional offices, was also utilized to communicate warnings on Hugo and to keep National Disaster Co-ordinators informed. In many ways this procedure facilitated the high level of mobilization.

Preparedness Information

When the threat of Hugo became imminent, the media began issuing preparedness tips. This information reflected their utilization of PCDPPP documents, including "Hurricanes and Preparedness: Notes for Radio and T.V. Announcers in the Eastern Caribbean" as well as other audio-visual materials which had been produced over the last few years. In addition, National Emergency Organizations reported an extensive demand for PCDPPP hurricane preparedness leaflets.

Training of Personnel

The LRCS and PAHO/WHO

Training Programme for first-aid and health personnel ensured that the needs for such personnel were met principally from within the region. Earlier PCDPPP training in emergency planning for environmental health and water supply services enabled local personnel to monitor water quality. Thus, in spite of severe disruption of water supplies, contamination and infections were kept under control.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Programmes

The PCDPPP monitors and regularly evaluates country-based programmes. An evaluation of the disaster management system in four countries members of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States had shown areas for immediate concern; the passage of Hurricane Dean provided another opportunity to review the warning and mobilization systems and highlighted critical gaps in regional warning, which were forcefully brought to the attention of the governments and agencies concerned. The advanced level of warning for Hurricane Hugo can be attributed directly to the PCDPPP's intervention after Hurricane Dean.

Response to Hurricane Hugo

Rapid damage assessments resulted from a quick response by national agencies and the regional defense system and were facilitated by the prepositioning of agency response teams and PCDPPP/PAHO/OFDA/Red Cross personnel. This made it possible to have definite lists of needs and requests for relief assistance and ensured the timely identification of priority emergency needs.



UNDRO/PCDPPP

Response and restoration activities were undertaken within 72 hours of the disaster. Here, in Montserrat, a tarpaulin cover being spread over a roofless house.

Over 95% of the emergency relief supplies received in the stricken countries were appropriate and needed. This can be attributed, in part, to the daily meetings to review needs, co-ordinated and chaired by UNDRO/PCDPPP staff. The meetings brought together donors and assessment teams who visited the islands during the day and then returned with a list of requirements. Donors' responses could therefore focus on specific needs.

Regional Response Mechanism

The Hugo event highlighted the capacity and framework for a future regional disaster-response triggering mechanism. Logistics operations, including the transportation of first-response teams to the af-

ected islands, were mounted under the auspices of CARICOM by regional defense forces. Their efficiency suggests that the Caricom Disaster Relief Unit will have a major role to play also in the future.

As was the case with Hurricane Gilbert in 1988, the Caribbean region has demonstrated again that, in times of emergency, many local resources can be found and called upon to provide assistance to stricken neighbours. The relief offered from this source is generally timely and always appropriate. What is needed now is a formalized contingency mechanism, through which countries can pledge specific emergency resources when they themselves are not affected. A successful, regional disaster-response triggering mecha-

nism must be supported by well organized national emergency systems. This is one area to which both government and funding agencies should ascribe a high priority.

Implications for PCDPPP Activities

The above conclusions reinforce the focus of the PCDPPP's programme, which emphasizes the need to establish appropriate regional mechanisms prior to PCDPPP's cessation of activities, currently scheduled for December 1990. In particular, a number of activities remain to be undertaken or further developed, within the context of the forthcoming International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, 1990 - 2000. ■