

Lessons Learned in the immediate UN response:

The immediate response of the UN system in Honduras, which was praised by the Government and donors, can be considered most **effective** and well co-ordinated on account of the good preparation of each agency and the DMT to address such an emergency. The weakness of relevant Government structures at the central level not only highlighted this central UN role but made it essential.

HQ support was adequate in this first phase, with particular reference to rapid authorizations and delegation of authority to country offices (i.e. WHO/PAHO and UNICEF immediately authorized the adjustment of the regular programme and the redirection of resources to the emergency, raising, in the case of WHO, the delegated authority for local procurement from \$10,000 to \$60,000, similarly, funds were rapidly confirmed to the WFP Representative who could immediately approve a \$200,000 rapid response food aid operation, and authorisation was immediately granted to him for the use of regular in-country stocks and funds from a "food monetisation account" to support relevant logistic operations; UNDP approved early the allocation of \$200,000 to strengthen the capacity of the RC Office to address the emergency; by the end of November, UNICEF released \$1,350,000 from its Emergency Programme Fund)

One problem associated with such an intensive effort by the UN system agencies is the **administrative capacity** of each office. Several agencies feel that one important lesson of this emergency, which could apply to all emergencies, is the need to immediately strengthen that capacity from the very first days (in Honduras, staff members' families were also affected by the disaster, weakening the existing capacity). Whatever is the pre-emergency administrative capacity of an office, it is also understandable that staff trained to follow certain practices find it difficult to apply new rules and develop overnight new mechanisms adapted to the swift action required in an emergency. In that light, WHO/PAHO found most useful the early secondment of an experienced administrator from another office in the region. Similarly, WFP requested additional support from its headquarters. This is critical not only for the first phase of an emergency but also for the administration of, and reporting on, special additional resources put at their disposal by donors for both the protracted emergency and recovery phases. New or increased workloads include procurement (relief items, vehicles, fuel, communication equipment and computers) and relevant administrative support, the hiring of additional staff and the rental of additional accommodation, beside new reporting activities.

Similarly, the importance of **information** and reporting for a co-ordinated UN response and resource mobilisation cannot be over-emphasized and relevant capacity building must also start on the very first days of an emergency. For that purpose, given transport and communication infrastructure difficulties, a field operations network had to be developed to facilitate vital links with the affected people and to monitor both priority needs and relief activities.

TRANSITION FROM RELIEF TO RECOVERY

The UNDMT agreed early that both protracted emergency relief and urgent recovery needs, such as the restoration of essential services, had to be addressed simultaneously. At the same time, UN support was needed for the preparation of medium term rehabilitation / reconstruction strategies and programmes. This was only partly reflected in the Interagency **Transitional Appeal**.

Despite the initial short deadline which did not allow for a comprehensive assessment of protracted emergency needs and the development of specific action plans, the preparation **process** for the Appeal was considered in Honduras as another excellent opportunity to test the good cooperative spirit and coordinated approach of the UN System agencies. Mixed sectoral working groups were established by the UNDMT with representatives of all interested agencies, and the hectic pace at which they were required to work represented for many the best example so far of active UN collaborative work and coordination in Honduras. It was felt however that the short timetable had not allowed direct Government participation as would have been desirable, but the active participation of three Government ministers on launching date confirmed that they fully supported the Appeal.

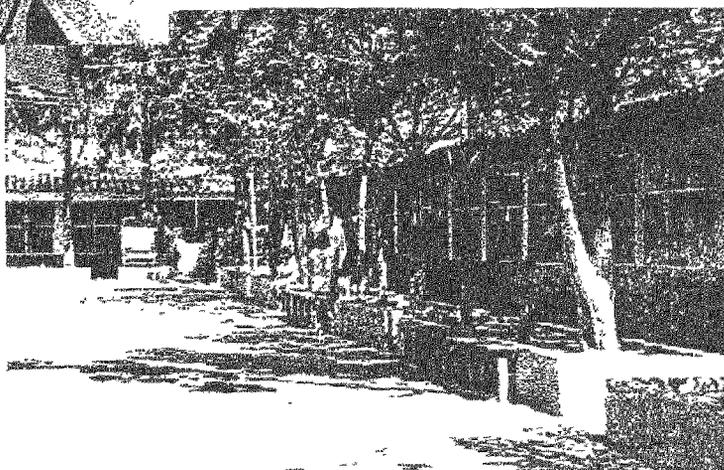
Relatively meager contributions received so far in direct **response to the Appeal** (except for important relief food aid which was already in the pipeline and about \$3.5 million received from UNICEF national committees and governments) have not only been raising scepticism about the usefulness of these intensive efforts at a time when all energies were needed to manage a serious emergency, but seem to confirm a general perception that perhaps the process should have started earlier, prior to the decision by the international community to hold an early Consultative Group meeting on rehabilitation and reconstruction. Indeed, the launching of the Transitional Appeal on the eve of the 9 December IBRD Consultative Group meeting in Washington may have found the attention of donor administrations (and media) concentrated on the preparation of that meeting and relevant issues, making it difficult to refocus the attention on the emergency needs. The **timing** of such an international appeal is therefore most important, and given its late readiness, it might have been better to postpone its issuance until after the Washington meeting, with a message along the following lines: "The victims of Mitch cannot wait for economic rehabilitation/reconstruction strategies, decisions and resources to address their essential daily needs".

Special efforts are still needed to convey to donors that the emergency is far from being over and that resources are needed urgently. A UN Inter-Agency task force is addressing the urgent issue of the population in **shelters**, a priority concern of the protracted emergency. Schools and other educational centres are being used to accommodate those that have lost their houses. After the water subsided, several victims were able to go back to their areas of origin, managing to repair their houses or staying with relatives. As a consequence, the number of people currently in official temporary shelters has been drastically reduced to about 28,000. The UN agencies are providing them with support (food, medicine, clean water, etc). A Norwegian contribution of \$800,000 to UNDP in

response to the Appeal has been channelled to IOM for providing temporary structures for those in Tegucigalpa, allowing them to vacate the schools for the beginning of the school year in February.



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There are 150 educational centres currently being used as shelters. It is estimated that more than 100,000 children could miss the 1999 school year if additional resources are not secured. Materials used for the temporary shelters will be recycled for the construction of schools, community centres, warehouses etc. There are also urgent needs for replacing educational material and textbooks lost in the floods. Clean water supply and control, and sanitation, for which no contributions have yet been received, remain real emergencies throughout the country, given the high risks of epidemics which are also present in contaminated mud accumulated in cities that need urgent cleaning up.

What is not included in the Appeal but also deserves immediate attention is the need for an assessment of the medium to long-term impact of the disaster on people, with particular reference to vulnerable groups, such as children and women, for the purpose of reorienting relevant programmes. Similarly, nutritional surveillance needs to be enhanced.

Lessons learned from the transition period:

The Appeal preparation process at country level represented an excellent UN System coordinated exercise which confirmed the good cooperative spirit which has developed over the recent years among UN agencies in Honduras. This was confirmed during a recent regional UNICEF meeting in Nicaragua evaluating the response to the emergency, which also provided an opportunity for the UNICEF Honduras team to agree on further joint programmes with WHO/PAHO.

Important efforts are still needed to develop a reliable UN database for required reporting to donors and the international community in general. It should capture available updated information on damages, protracted emergency needs, contributions received and their use. It could then be expanded to include information on rehabilitation needs and contributions.

One of the lessons to be learned is the importance of the timing of an Appeal to ensure the best response possible from donors

Mechanisms for resource mobilisation also need to be enhanced and better co-ordinated.

..seeds arrived in La Mosquitia.



SUPPORT TO RECOVERY AND REHABILITATION

At country level, support to the Recovery and Rehabilitation phase started immediately once the critical period of search and rescue was over. This was facilitated by the existence of sectoral groups working on the preparation of the CCA and various programme frameworks, in consultation with Government services and civil society. Additional consultants were hired to assist that process.

The Government relied very much on UN System assistance for the preparation of the 9 December IDB Consultative Group meeting on rehabilitation and reconstruction needs which was held in Washington. An ECLAC mission in November assisted UNDP in making a preliminary assessment of damages in the social, infrastructure and productive sectors as well as on the environment, which was submitted to the Washington meeting. The UN System contribution to the preparation of that meeting was warmly acknowledged by the Honduran delegation at the meeting.

Another important contribution of the UN system to the preparation of that phase has been the briefing of, and assistance to, the numerous bilateral donor **assessment missions** which visited the country from the early days of the emergency. Such missions were often accompanied by local UN technical experts.

With most regular programmes being suspended in the aftermath of the disaster, UN System programmers set out early to review them for reorientation towards recovery and reconstruction needs, in close cooperation with Government services involved. UNDP, WHO/PAHO and UNICEF worked **actively** with the **World Bank** and the Government in the reorientation of WB loans towards urgent rehabilitation needs in the field of education and health, including the repair and reconstruction of schools and medical centres. In mid-January, WFP approved an expanded food aid operation in support of the recovery phase. The two-year programme will provide 58,103 tons of food expected to reach some 600,000 people, two-thirds of which being channelled through food-for-work activities, and one-third as support to targeted vulnerable groups.

One area of special focus for reconstruction is **environmental** protection. The effects of Hurricane Mitch were aggravated by man-made factors. Population pressures had resulted in deforestation and soil erosion, with 100,000 ha/yr. converted to agriculture or livestock, often in marginal areas or areas more suitable for forestry. Heavy rains that fell on denuded or deforested soils, often in steeply sloped areas, led to the loss of topsoil, landslides and sedimentation (USGS estimates that the country suffered over one million landslides and it has charted the hydrological changes in parts of the country). The weakened environment increases further the risks for the next rainy season, and efforts towards environmental protection which were on-going before Mitch need to be extended and strengthened.

In the aftermath of Mitch, a key initiative of UNDP has been the establishment of an inter-sectoral **environmental forum**, including government agencies, international organisations, NGOs and academic institutions, to coordinate activities to mitigate further damage to the environment. The objectives of the forum are to share information, ensure the most efficient use of resources and avoid duplication of efforts, link sectors, levels and actors, and allow the coordinated and participatory development of project proposals. Information is being entered into a database which will be made available on the web.

Continued assistance is also required in the area of **disaster prevention and management**. A Government request for assistance to a new, expanded phase of the project supported by UNDP in three departments is currently under consideration in the light of the experience gained from its first phases in the context of the Mitch disaster. Some donors have expressed interest in supporting such a programme and various proposals and initiatives are being reviewed.