

INTRODUCTION

In the analysis of the UN System response to the Mitch disaster in Honduras and future recovery and disaster management capacitation needs, it is essential to consider the context in which such a disaster struck the country

The exceptional nature and strength of Mitch should not hide the fact that Honduras is a disaster prone area, and that the extent of casualties and damages cannot be attributed entirely to this "act of God". All UN System agencies in Honduras agree that not only the poor bear the brunt of this disaster (often living in marginal, high-risk areas), but **poverty** itself is the ultimate cause of the high level of losses. Indeed, environment factors that have contributed to them, such as erosion arising from the high level of deforestation (80,000 ha/year) and poor land use, are directly linked to poverty. It is partly in response to this problem that long before Mitch, UN agencies started focussing their interventions on poverty alleviation and sustained development. The UNDP 1998-2000 programme is concentrated in those two areas and governance, including support to activities for the protection of environment for which a framework is being finalised. The 1996-2000 Country Programme of UNICEF also addresses the problem of poverty, focussing on the provision of basic services, particularly to the poorest areas of the North which were severely hit by the hurricane.

Unless recovery and reconstruction investments address the fundamental problem of poverty and its effects on the environment, they are bound to result in short-live improvements that risk being washed away by the next hurricane or flood, making again thousands of helpless victims.

It is bearing in mind the above considerations that the UN System agencies coordinated their response to the Mitch emergency and prepared their contributions to the recovery and rehabilitation process, bearing in mind the specific mandate and target groups of individual agencies.