

3. CIDA and its Canadian Partners' Response to Hurricane Mitch

3.1 Introduction

Hurricane Mitch was not an ordinary storm. A Category V hurricane, Mitch is now considered the fourth most powerful Atlantic storm in recorded history. It affected three million people, primarily in Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala – countries ill prepared to respond to a disaster of this magnitude. Resources from all over the world were called upon to assist in the emergency phase.

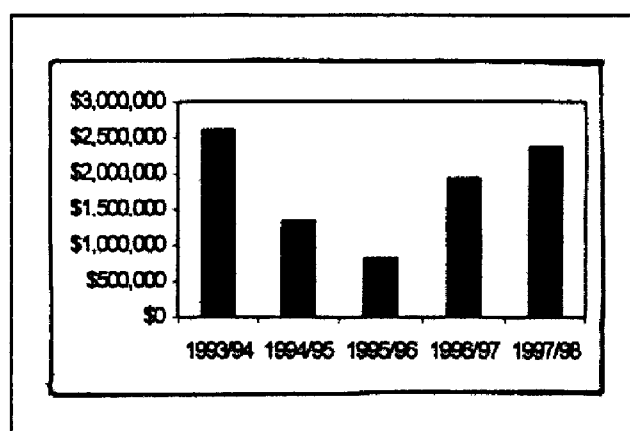
The following sections examine how CIDA and its Canadian partners' – DFAIT, DND, Red Cross – responded to the disaster.

3.2 Disaster Preparedness

Finding 13: International agencies, including CIDA, contributed to helping both Honduras and Nicaragua prepare for natural disasters.

In order to help countries prepare for an emergency situation, international agencies support disaster preparedness initiatives. CIDA, for example, has contributed to disaster preparedness by supporting other international agencies (mostly UN) in areas such as: influencing government policy, formulation of national disaster plans, training key officials in disaster management, establishing emergency networks, undertaking mitigation activities (establishing building codes for construction and reinforcing essential buildings such as hospitals), risk mapping and developing and using coordination mechanisms at disaster sites, and supporting information networks that can pass on lessons learned or other information for good disaster preparedness also, it has supported a wide variety of community based interventions with organizations through Canadian NGOs.

Exhibit 3.1 IHA Expenditure on Disaster Preparedness



Source: IHA 1999

Finding 14: Despite some local emergency preparedness capacity, neither Honduras nor Nicaragua had the capacity to prepare for a natural disaster such as Hurricane Mitch.

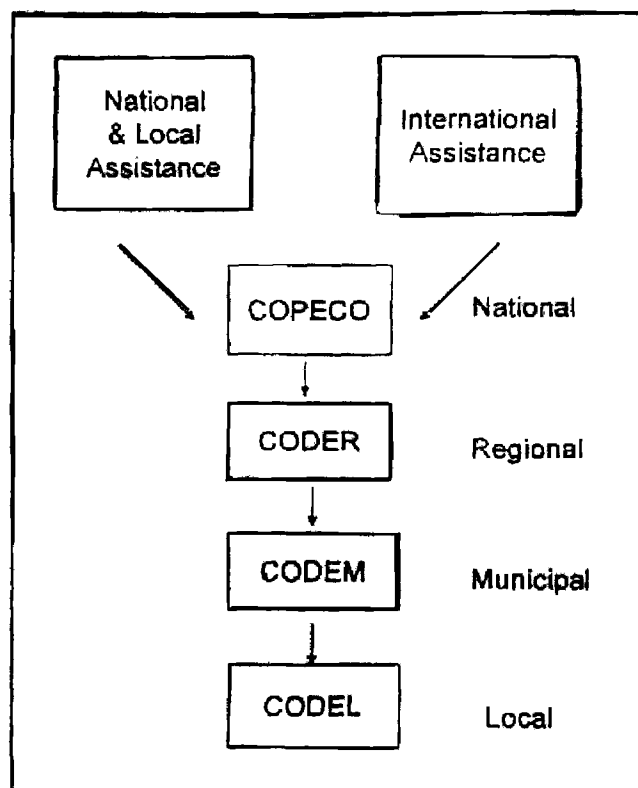
Every country has the responsibility to prepare its country for disaster. In both Honduras and Nicaragua, the *defensa civil* (civil defence authorities) were established to improve the preparedness for response to natural disasters.

Honduras' civil defence authority, the *Comision Permanente de Contingencias* (or COPECO), headed by the President, delegated authority to the regional, municipal and local levels to try to manage the aftermath of Mitch. Resources were channeled through COPECO, and the organization distributed funding to the *Comite de Emergencia Municipal* (CODEM), who in turn provided funding to *Comite de Emergencia Regional* (CODER).

Exhibit 3.2 shows these relationships. Although the civil defence authorities played a role in gathering information on damages, COPECO and the other committees were not effective; they lacked the resources to respond (i.e. funds, emergency preparedness capabilities), as well as the confidence of donors to channel funding through them.

In Nicaragua, the situation was similar. Although existing systems and procedures may have been capable of dealing with minor natural disasters, the authorities were not prepared to deal with a disaster of the magnitude of Hurricane Mitch. The President, after initially hesitating to declare a state of emergency, established by presidential decree a state of emergency committee (the *Comite Nacional de Emergencia*) to oversee the response to Hurricane Mitch at a national level. Despite its best efforts, the damages caused by Hurricane Mitch overwhelmed existing resources.

Exhibit 3.2 Honduras Emergency Resource Channels



Finding 15: CIDA IHA has developed a disaster preparedness strategy document, and is currently in the process of developing procedures to implement the strategy. Staff shortages have slowed this process.

International donor agencies and NGOs are faced with increasing challenges in the new global environment for humanitarian action and disaster response. These include changes in technology, changes in the roles of government and non-state actors, challenges in interfacing between civil and military, between humanitarian and political actors, and challenges in the availability and demand for resources.

In order to develop adequate disaster preparedness programming to navigate through this environment, CIDA developed a disaster preparedness strategy document (original 1995; revised July 1997). The document outlines the Agency's strategies, including the development of results-based indicators to adequately measure the impacts of disaster preparedness programs, internal strategies (i.e. corporate initiatives) and external (i.e. partnerships), responsibility centres, etc. brief guidelines on the role of field officers in emergencies.

Procedures that will help the Agency deal efficiently with natural disasters are in the process of being developed, and in part will help NGOs establish disaster preparedness programs. However, no standard set of procedures has been developed for implementing the strategy. Data collected both within and outside CIDA, primarily from the Canadian NGO community, points to the need for standard procedures. For example, a set of procedures inside CIDA would speed up the sharing of information and the coordination between different desks, as well as its dissemination to the media and the public, and would, overall, increase the timeliness of response. As for the NGO community, data collected from Canadian NGOs reflects some concern with respect to the lack of procedures that would help them better prepare and plan their response.

The cutbacks at CIDA over the last five years have had a significant effect on IHA. Unlike other parts of the aid program, in which staff cutbacks follow program cutbacks, IHA must respond to disasters as they occur – there have been no cutbacks in disasters.

Finding 16: Although experiences in the field of disaster generate valuable lessons learned, there are limited ways of sharing information throughout the Agency.

CIDA's involvement in several major emergency relief initiatives (e.g. flooding in China, Hurricanes Mitch and Georges, Rwanda, etc.) has provided many useful lessons learned. Evidence suggests, however, that there are limited ways of sharing information learned from those experiences within the Agency. At present, new staff at CIDA receives a three-hour training session on disaster preparedness. Other staff receives no refresher training, and there is no system to update staff knowledge of lessons learned from recent experiences. Interviews indicate that CIDA may be "reinventing the wheel" each time it responds to an emergency – wasting effort, decreasing efficiency, and ultimately reducing effectiveness. Interviews with those involved in Mitch indicate that lessons were learned and improvements occurred, but as staff continue to turn over, valuable experience is lost.

Finding 17: While there were relatively positive responses on government preparedness, there were mixed reviews of the preparedness of various Canadian groups.

With a few exceptions, Canada was adequately prepared to respond to Mitch. CIDA IHA knew its roles and responsibilities, as did the other CIDA actors. DFAIT had developed a working relationship with DND and CIDA, and the various players in the DND DART were trained and ready. The major Canadian NGOs were also clear about their capabilities. There were a few notable exceptions. First, the Canadian government does not stock key consumables for international disasters, and thus does not have easy access to appropriate goods in times of disaster. Community based NGOs and other community groups are not adequately informed about how they can contribute in an emergency. Both of these areas are discussed below.

Finding 18: Canada does not have adequate infrastructure to coordinate a disaster response in a short period of time.

In order to fulfil its mandate to respond in a timely and coordinated way to an emergency such as Hurricane Mitch (and for the Agency to play a lead role in disaster preparedness), CIDA needs a central coordination centre from which to operate – what is commonly referred to as a "war room." Such a room would have dedicated space equipped with basic communication technology, would be staffed by people to communicate with the media and the public, and would have established procedures, contact lists of partners and other donor agencies, as well as an inventory of individuals who could be quickly seconded from the Agency and elsewhere when an emergency becomes evident.

Presently, CIDA does not have such resources readily available. Faced with the limited budgets of both the Agency and its partners in Canada, CIDA needs to consider its requirements within a realistic framework. Presently, some organizations such as CARE Canada are equipped with such facilities, and other organizations have components of a "war room." CIDA may need to consider combining forces with groups operating in emergency response in order to create a joint war room or similar facility.

Finding 19: There is a lack of information in the broader NGO community about how to respond effectively to a natural emergency such as Hurricane Mitch.

Once the degree of devastation caused by Hurricane Mitch became known to Canadians, NGOs began to work with their constituents to gather goods and funds for emergency relief – in many cases with little knowledge of what was required to respond to the emergency. Despite good intentions, many NGOs collected supplies that were not appropriate for emergency disaster relief, and in some cases hindered more than helped. Although organizations such as the Red Cross emphasized the need for cash to

purchase goods locally, this went unheeded and there are still Canadian church basements stocked with generously donated goods that were not sent.

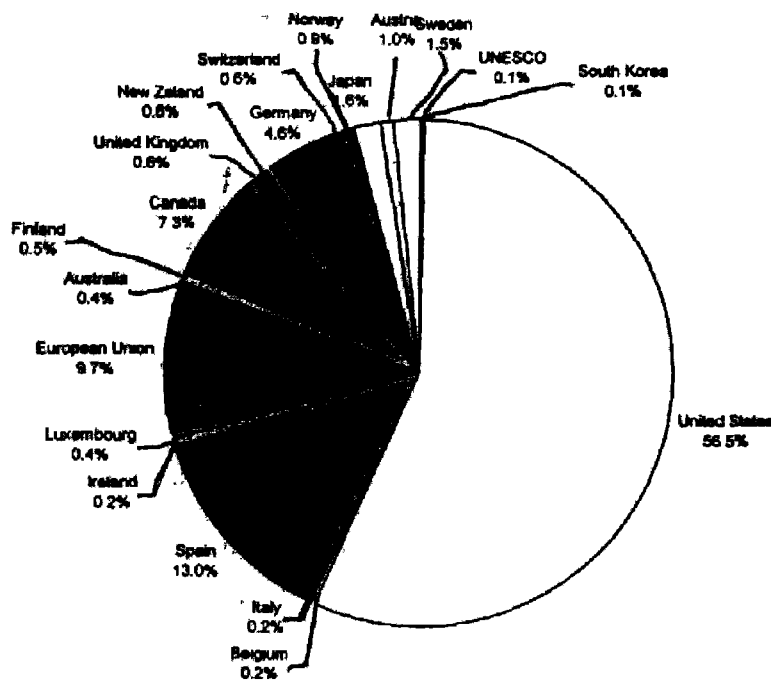
The problem was the lack of ready information before and during the early stages of the emergency regarding the most appropriate responses to the needs of those affected by a natural disaster. NGOs in general need to be educated about how to respond to natural disasters.

3.3 Mobilizing Resources for Relief

Finding 20: Canada's response to Hurricane Mitch was the fourth largest contribution of all donors.

As of November 10, 1998, Canada was classified the fourth largest donor to the affected countries, with an overall contribution of \$9 million. As shown in Exhibit 3.3 the United States provided more than half of international aid for a total of \$70 million. Spain and the European Union have respectively forwarded \$16.1 M and \$12 M to the different countries affected by Hurricane Mitch.

Exhibit 3.3 International Humanitarian Assistance for Hurricane Mitch



The Canadian contribution considered here does not include the DART deployment in La Ceiba, which was part of the Joint Task Force Central America initiative (JTF CAM). The full cost of the DART is estimated to be \$27.6M and incremental costs \$4.9M.

Finding 21: During the emergency phase of Hurricane Mitch, Canada successfully mobilized resources to attend to the needs of the most vulnerable populations of Honduras and Nicaragua.

Canada's contribution to the relief efforts in Honduras and Nicaragua consisted of mobilizing resources to fund three main components: CIDA funding to the Canadian Red Cross Airlift Coordination Team; DND and CIDA funding of the Joint Task Force Central America; and CIDA emergency relief projects. Exhibit 3.4 presents an overview of the timelines in which each of these initiatives took place. Appendix V presents a flowchart of daily events with respect to CIDA's response.

Exhibit 3.4 Relief Initiative Timeline

Description	October '98		November '98				December '98			
	Wk3	Wk4	Wk1	Wk2	Wk3	Wk4	Wk1	Wk2	Wk3	Wk4
1. Hurricane passes through C.A.										
2. Emergency phase										
3. DND Airlifts										
4. DART deployment										
5. ACT coordination										
6. CIDA/IHA project funding										

Finding 22: As part of the Joint Task Force Central America (JTF CAM), CIDA played a key role in the reconnaissance mission to Central America. As a result of that mission, the DART was mobilized as part of Canada's response to Hurricane Mitch.

The DART's mission is "to be prepared for rapid deployment in response to assistance requests for international or national humanitarian relief, as directed by the Canadian Government" (1st Canadian Division Headquarters, 1998). A 180-person organization, the DART is comprised of the following components:

- **Headquarters:** a command and control function to perform on-site tactical control and to provide national level command and inter-agency co-ordination, and information collection, processing and dissemination team, communications capacities, and liaison and administrative support.
- **Medical Platoon:** consisting of 40 people, with casualty evacuation and medical support, a field hospital for assessment and primary care for up to 500 out-patients daily, and a holding facility for up to 30 longer term patients, a trauma response and resuscitation unit, field laboratory unit, limited pre- and post-natal care, preventive medical/environmental health team, pharmacy facilities, and critical incident stress monitoring and counselling.
- **Engineer Platoon:** 40-person unit capable of providing all engineering support requirements for the DART, purified water at up to 50,000 litres per day, structural and utilities damage assessment teams, advice and limited support to restoration of essential structures, power supplies, water facilities, sewage facilities, and other critical life support constructions, mine and explosive ordnance identification, disposal and awareness training, and light earthmoving/route clearance.
- **Logistics Support Element:** a 30-person unit that provides all supply, maintenance and transportation support to the DART, food services for the medical facility, coordination of local

purchasing and contracting, coordination of air movement, and limited coordination of transportation, storage, and distribution of essential humanitarian supplies.

Security Element: a 35-person unit based on a normal infantry platoon and a small Military Police section, capable of providing light security to all DART installations and personnel, labour support to other DART elements, initial incident investigation, police/security coordination with host nation elements, limited (emergency) security to other agencies, and limited support to light search and rescue operations.

As part of the decision to employ the DART in response to Hurricane Mitch, a team that included individuals from DND, CIDA, and DFAIT undertook a reconnaissance mission to Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua from November 5 - 7, 1998. The purpose of the mission was to determine what country and specific region would benefit most from the DART's capacities. The reconnaissance mission met with Canadian consular representatives, US consular officials, and representatives of the US Forces, as well as with national ministries and government officials. Following consultations in Nicaragua and a survey of affected areas in the country, it was decided that the DART was not appropriate for that country.

Honduras, however, (specifically the La Ceiba region in the Valle del Aguan) had the prerequisites to make the DART an effective rapid response mechanism. The criteria for selecting a deployment location included: the proximity to an operational airport, the degree of security at the selected site, the infrastructure for telecommunications and warehousing, and the extent to which the needs of the population matched DART's response capacities (e.g. medical clinics, water purification structures, transportation, technical and engineering capacities). In addition, the DART must operate in a permissive environment. Civil government and authorities must remain in place and agree to the deployment of the DART, and there must be no organized or widespread resistance to the DART deployment or operations (DND, 1998). The La Ceiba region met these criteria. The reconnaissance mission concluded that there was little risk of duplication of effort amongst donors in Honduras in general, and in the La Ceiba region in particular.

An important part of the selection of the La Ceiba area included consultation with the municipal authorities (mayor), Canadian and international NGOs and the Standard Fruit Company. In the planning and implementation stages, coordination and communication between these groups were very important. The Standard Fruit Company volunteered its land for deployment of the DART and supplied needed medication to the DART medical platoon.

The Canadian Forces established a humanitarian relief operation in Central America at La Ceiba, in northern Honduras under the designation of JTF CAM. Its purpose was to carry Canadian personnel, supplies and donated humanitarian aid to the region. The JTF CAM was composed of 400 Canadian Forces personnel, 5 helicopters, and the DART. All of these resources were well deployed.

Finding 23: At the mobilization stage, the Canadian public often needs a visible sign that we are acting on our humanitarian interests.

The Canadian public supports humanitarian assistance and asks its government to do the same. As the chief instrument of Canadian government policy, IHA has the responsibility to respond to disasters and to signal the Canadian public that it is doing so. The paradox for IHA is that although the best way to respond to a disaster is often to provide cash support, this is not a visible demonstration of Canadian aid. In the Hurricane Mitch aftermath, one visible sign of Canada's concern and support was the DART. Using the DART, however, is expensive and not always the most appropriate response. During the evaluation many people mentioned the need for IHA to make Canada's presence visible – some argued for a central Canadian warehouse of supplies that could be flown to a disaster site, others argued for more decentralized approaches.

Finding 24: In order to help CIDA coordinate with its NGO partners, the Canadian Red Cross was selected to implement the Airlift Coordination Team.

The Canadian Red Cross, contracted by CIDA, was given the responsibility to manage the coordination of Canadian NGO relief efforts. The Airlift Coordination Team (ACT) consisted of six components:

1. An Operations Centre situated at the Red Cross National Office. This Centre, with a staff of six, functioned as the call receiving and coordination facility. NGOs with goods to be shipped made arrangements with the Centre.
2. An alliance with the Information to Knowledge (i2K)/CARE Canada computer network: An i2K system specialist joined the ACT to provide computerized support to the operation.
3. A communications strategy: Utilizing multiple communications tools, the communications strategy provided the public, donors and NGOs with up-to-date information on the airlifts.
4. A Receiving/Warehouse office at CFB Trenton: to manage the receipt of humanitarian aid and to liaise with the Canadian military.
5. Bilingual (English/Spanish) flight escorts who would accompany each flight to coordinate the receipt by the local NGOs. This component was only used once during the ACT's existence, since it was determined to be ineffective.
6. Coordination of passenger travel: To handle passengers on board the airlift aircraft accompanying goods being transported. The Red Cross' role involved communication with potential passengers, with CIDA, DND, and CFB Trenton.

The ACT coordinated with Canadian NGOs, the private sector, and government departments for the receipt, packaging, transportation and delivery of humanitarian supplies.

Finding 25: In general the Canadian Red Cross was successful in mobilizing Canadian relief efforts to the field.

Evidence suggests that the Canadian Red Cross' capacities and past experience in humanitarian work helped it to fulfil its mandate. The use of the ACT in Canada allowed NGOs to work together cooperatively and provided a single focal point of contact for DND, CIDA, DFAIT, private sector donors, and NGOs. This helped in the coordination of secure storage of goods (i.e. CFB Trenton) until they could be airlifted to NGOs in the field. ACT staff, who were able to communicate in five languages, provided wide-scale access for participating agencies. Other communication tools allowed the ACT to help inform the Canadian public as how to best respond to the emergency. These included an Internet web page (in English, French, and Spanish), as well as information sharing through the media (e.g. news conferences, television and radio interviews, situation reports, etc.) stressing the importance of coordination of efforts to avoid duplication.

In order to help ensure that appropriate goods were being transported to Central America, ACT assembled an advisory committee composed of representatives from NGOs to advise on the highest priority humanitarian needs. As a result, ACT set three priorities for aid: high protein, ready-to-eat food, medicine, and water purification supplies. This helped ensure that quality materials were being transported and maximized the impact of the Canadian response (Canadian Red Cross, 1998).

Between November 13 and December 11, 1998, the ACT handled over 1,200 telephone calls, 300 faxes and e-mails, and made arrangements for humanitarian flights carrying over 1 million pounds of aid (Canadian Red Cross, 1998).

The Canadian Red Cross sees the ACT as a growing role for itself in Canada, with what it terms a "standing ACT capability for use in national and international disaster relief" (Canadian Red Cross, 1998).

Finding 26: Despite overall competency, certain coordination and communication aspects of the ACT remained troublesome to NGOs in Honduras and Nicaragua.

The Canadian Red Cross competently implemented the ACT in Canada. However, some challenges arose for NGOs in accessing and retrieving their shipments. There were delays or miscommunications between the airport in La Ceiba and some NGOs in regard to shipment arrivals (which were at times late or did not arrive at all). Incidents were reported of containers that could not be located, which resulted in delays in distribution of high priority supplies. Some packages were mislabeled (resulting in some NGOs receiving the wrong shipment) and at times packages were not labeled at all, adding to the delay in identification and distribution of goods. Some NGOs noted that there was not one person to receive shipments and coordinate with local NGOs for distribution. It is clear that dispatchers were needed on the ground, but it is unclear to what extent these incidents affected vulnerable populations.

The role of the Canadian Red Cross as a coordinating agent for the ACT was not well known by those in Honduras and Nicaragua. Field evidence suggests that many of the NGOs whose counterparts used the ACT in Canada were generally unaware of the ACT's purpose and function. For example, the majority of Canadian NGOs interviewed in Nicaragua were not aware of the role of the Red Cross as the overall coordinating body of the airlifts. However, the responsibility for informing NGOs in the field rested with the Canadian NGOs and it was not part of the Red Cross' responsibility to communicate directly with NGOs in Honduras and Nicaragua.

Finding 27: Canadian Forces Base Trenton emerged as the mobilization point where supplies to be airlifted to Honduras and Nicaragua were transported and warehoused. This served as a useful temporary arrangement during the emergency, as no other permanent warehousing exists for emergency supplies.

Among those involved in emergency relief efforts, it is generally agreed that effective emergency response depends on several key requirements. Various sources, including the Canadian Red Cross and NGOs in Canada, Honduras and Nicaragua, indicated that a timely response to a natural disaster should be 48 hours after the state of emergency is declared. According to the Canadian Red Cross, key components that should be ready and available include such basics as food supplies, water purification tablets, plastic sheeting for temporary housing, basic medication, and blankets. These should be packaged and stored in a permanent warehousing facility. In addition, links with the Canadian military should be established in order to distribute goods to the affected areas. Since Canada did not have a warehouse ready with emergency goods at the time of the Mitch emergency, CFB Trenton served as the focal point to warehouse goods before they were sent to the field.

The Canadian international community does not have warehousing capacity for international emergencies, nor is it clear that this would be the most cost-effective solution. This is an area that requires further investigation and discussion.

Finding 28: Early assessments by CIDA project representatives in the field gave CIDA information from sources directly affected by the disaster. This contributed to the effective and appropriate mobilization of resources.

At the time of the hurricane, CIDA projects were operating in areas of Honduras and Nicaragua that were severely affected by Hurricane Mitch. These include the La Ceiba region in the north Atlantic coast of Honduras and the central department of Olancho. CIDA's local contacts provided detailed information on how Hurricane Mitch had impacted the region, including information on basic human needs issues (i.e. water, health, sanitation, basic housing), and on a longer term basis, the extent to which Hurricane Mitch affected existing CIDA funded projects. Furthermore, in Honduras, CIDA had a project at the national level that dealt with sustainable management of renewable natural resources (*Proyecto de apoyo a la gestion sostenible de los recursos naturales renovables en Honduras*). This project (in cooperation with its various partners) used its advanced technology visual satellite imagery in order to map the region and

view the destruction. The result of this collaboration was the production of a series of maps showing the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch (i.e. flooding, crop destruction, etc.).

In Nicaragua, the network of NGOs who worked in collaboration with the Canada Fund, for example, served as a valuable source of information for the Canada Fund coordinator and helped to determine the real needs of vulnerable populations in project regions. As a result, Canada was able to mobilize resources to assist the most vulnerable populations.

Finding 29: CIDA was able to mobilize its resources to the field during the emergency phase of Hurricane Mitch.

The evidence of the field mission to Honduras and Nicaragua suggests that Canada was one of the first donors to mobilize resources for the victims of Hurricane Mitch. With a few exceptions, this timely and appropriate response continued throughout the disaster period.

Canada's response began before Hurricane Mitch actually hit mainland Honduras. Canada participated in initial meetings with the World Bank, USAID, IADB, which took place at World Bank offices on Friday, October 23, 1998. During Hurricane Mitch and its aftermath, Canada was part of the coordination and information meetings held with various international bilateral and multilateral players, on Monday October 26, as well as at other meetings. This allowed Canada and other donor countries and agencies to reduce the risk of duplication of relief efforts. This participation triggered responses within CIDA's structure to respond to the disaster – for example, by redirecting existing project funds to areas of greatest need.

Finding 30: CIDA mobilized project funds to affected areas in Honduras and Nicaragua relatively quickly.

In order to provide relief to the region as quickly as possible, CIDA mobilized project funding to respond to Hurricane Mitch. NGOs operating with CIDA reported that funds reached them in a reasonably timely manner and enabled them to respond effectively to provide emergency assistance. Increased speed is always desirable and several respondents questioned why some NGOs were able to get projects running within one day, while CIDA took several weeks to respond. Exhibit 3.5 presents the figures and activities that were undertaken:

Exhibit 3.5 Initial CIDA Response to Hurricane Mitch

PROJECT	FUNDS	ACTIVITIES
PAHO	\$500,000	Emergency support
International Red Cross	\$500,000	Medical support
WFP	\$2,000,000	Food aid
PSU	\$500,000	Additional funding for local initiatives
Canada Fund	\$150,000	Additional funding for local initiatives
CARE Canada	\$100,000	Water storage containers and portable latrines
CECI	\$125,000	Housing
Médecins Sans Frontières	\$400,000	Medical assistance, etc.
World Vision Canada	\$100,000	Emergency shelters
Nicaragua Counterpart Fund	\$500,000	Local initiatives
Oxfam Canada/Quebec	\$100,000	Local initiatives
Save the Children Canada	\$130,000	Emergency relief