

5. Conclusions, Lessons Learned and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to assess CIDA's emergency response to Hurricane Mitch in order to provide CIDA with information to improve its performance in the future. CIDA's response was consistent with IHA's mandate and Canadian foreign policy objectives. The assistance provided eased the suffering of victims of Hurricane Mitch, and was appropriate to the conditions and needs of those populations. It was a good intervention.

For the evaluation team's purposes, IHA's performance was judged in part by the extent to which it fulfilled its objectives with respect to emergency humanitarian response. Hurricane Mitch provides a good case study from which lessons can be learned and recommendations made to CIDA with respect to improving its performance. This chapter provides an analysis of lessons learned and recommendations. These are shaped around IHA program performance from three perspectives:

- Accountability Perspective
- Capacity Building Perspective
- Knowledge Perspective

In this context, the evaluation team looked at the various components of CIDA's preparedness and its operational response, including its coordination and communication function. The evaluation explored elements of disaster preparedness such as training, procedures, roles and responsibilities, and elements of disaster response such as the ACT, the DART, CIDA projects and so forth. Data was drawn from documents, interviews in Canada, a conference in the Dominican Republic, and a field mission in Honduras and Nicaragua.

5.2 Accountability: Timeliness, Appropriateness and Relevance

CIDA needs to be prepared to respond to calls for emergency humanitarian assistance and it needs to have the mechanisms in place to respond quickly and appropriately. The ideas of timeliness and appropriateness capture the accountability perspective of IHA's work.

Summary and Lessons Learned

The timeliness and appropriateness of CIDA's response to Hurricane Mitch depended on strong coordination between and among a wide assortment of key players:

- in Canada (DFAIT and DND, CIDA branches and departments),
- in Nicaragua and Honduras (governments, multilateral agencies such as PAHO and UNDP), and
- in civil society (e.g. Red Cross, CARE, CECI, Oxfam, MSF, Alternative).

Although the global effort – including CIDA's – was good, not surprisingly, we found that there was a lack of preparedness of the two affected countries, Honduras and Nicaragua. This inhibited their ability to respond to relief efforts.

Information is a key to a fast and appropriate response, and Canada learned that obtaining good information is quite difficult in these circumstances. In the emergency phase, CIDA worked closely with DFAIT and DND to engage in a reconnaissance mission to find out what was happening on the ground. The effort to obtain information depended heavily on Canadian field staff and contacts among NGOs and private sector firms and multilateral agencies.

As information flowed, CIDA became involved in identifying the best target location of the DART and supported and coordinated various aspects of acquisition and distribution of supplies through CIDA

projects, the ACT, and fund reallocation. CIDA's coordinating efforts included senior managers in the government as well as the various ministerial offices and ministers.

Coordination between Canada and the field is vital to ensure timely delivery of goods to vulnerable populations. The coordinating efforts were demanding and exacted a heavy staff commitment. Unfortunately, IHA staff was seriously stretched and "undermanned." Good coordination depends on the capacities within organizations, and carries a cost in terms of money and resources. CIDA's ability to be respond quickly and appropriately was aided by some formal and informal coordinating tools such as policies, procedures, standing committees, training and so forth. However, more needs to be done, especially in handling regular staff turnover.

CIDA does not have, and probably should not develop, the capacity to be operational in an emergency situation – its strength lies in playing a coordination role. CIDA needs to develop the conditions that best prepare it to coordinate the efforts of others. CIDA lacks the infrastructure needed to manage the complex array of calls and information that occurs at the time of disaster. It needs quick response systems to access resources to help it in the coordinating effort. For example, CIDA's sub-contract to the Red Cross, and to a lesser degree CARE (for i2k), provides lessons about how CIDA can coordinate in order to operationalize in the future.

CIDA can play an important communication and support role in bringing the operational groups of government (DND) and civil society together to improve our ability to respond to emergencies. This is not simple. DND operational services, while excellent, are comparatively expensive by NGO standards. CIDA needs to quickly assess when and how to best utilize the resources of DND.

In terms of relevance of CIDA's response, evidence indicates that CIDA provided support that was consistent with the needs and priorities of the most vulnerable populations in targeted areas in Honduras and Nicaragua. Emergency goods including water, medicine, and food were provided to populations severely affected by the hurricane in both Nicaragua and Honduras, although this could have been more timely.

We learned that the conditions for a quick and appropriate response in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are quite different than in other parts of the world. Although in the LAC we can respond quickly with appropriate goods, it is more difficult to do so in other parts of the world, primarily because of the distances involved. The ACT and the DART worked well in the Honduran and Nicaraguan context due in part to the countries' proximity to Canada. These tools may not necessarily provide such timely response in other circumstances or in other parts of the world in which CIDA operates. Thus, CIDA needs to develop strategies to determine how it should respond to emergencies, in ways that are both timely and cost-effective, from region to region.

The size of the response is also critical. Canada provided \$20 to \$30 million of assistance during the Hurricane Mitch disaster and has pledged \$100 million to the rehabilitation program. To some this seems a large response. We believe that the critical question is, "What is an appropriate response?" In this same vein, we learned that different groups have different expectations about CIDA's accountability. Developing some initial performance indicators might help.

In order to improve its timeliness and appropriateness, we recommend that IHA:

1. Engage in a staffing analysis in order to ascertain what IHA needs to meet its humanitarian assistance requirements. In the short term, engage and train new staff to ensure that the accountability requirements of the unit can be met. Develop a mechanism to second agency staff who are familiar with IHA needs during emergencies.
2. Complete the strategy and develop an operational plan and monitoring strategy for IHA work related to natural disasters. Ensure that the strategy balances the need to provide assistance and the need to keep Canadians informed of how they are assisting.

3. Develop a framework for both governance and operations within which the decisions can be made regarding the appropriate level of humanitarian assistance and how this is presented to the Canadian public.
4. Work with its partners to establish appropriate infrastructure so that it can quickly respond to disasters. Some bilateral agencies, notably USAID, have what they call a “war room” – a communications centre that can be operational in a matter of hours. While CIDA might not need its own war room, it is important to have access to such a facility. This might be accomplished through a standing offer or other types of partnership arrangements.
5. Work with bilateral branches and multilateral partners to conduct preparedness assessments within their regions and countries. These assessments would help IHA develop more operational priorities for its strategy.
6. Develop a mechanism to obtain humanitarian supplies (chlorine tablets, plastics, drugs, etc) within 24 hours. We think this can be done either through a warehousing system or through a standing offer system for suppliers.
7. Support the development of coordinating teams
 - An internal team (mix of political and managerial staff) that can quickly decide on the appropriateness of the Canadian intervention and provide feedback
 - Support the creation of two government coordinating committees for humanitarian assistance –one at the level of DG the other at the operational level
 - Support the efforts of NGOs in Canada to coordinate their humanitarian assistance work with CIDA – this is an emerging committee
 - Create a dialogue group among DFAIT, NGOs and DND in order to find ways to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of joint operational work
8. Ensure that in the future ACT has someone on the ground in the recipient country to help coordinate the distribution of goods to the appropriate NGOs
9. Develop appropriate guidelines, systems and tools to help CIDA staff manage during emergencies. These should include:
 - preparation pamphlets for known disaster seasons (hurricanes, monsoons, etc)
 - quick assessment tools
 - targeting vulnerable groups
10. Work with multilateral agencies to develop some standards/indicators for humanitarian response (timeliness, appropriateness)
11. Standardize mechanisms that would give field managers the authority to act quickly in an emergency. This would include the authority to link emergency initiatives to existing CIDA project work in targeted regions. This would also allow CIDA to provide timely, relevant assistance by working with partners in the field with whom the Agency has a level of familiarity and trust in their competence.

5.3 Improving Capacity Building

Since national governments are responsible for dealing with disasters, building their capacity is a critical issue in humanitarian assistance. However, capacity building does not end with the governments and civil society in developing countries – Canadian capacity must also be built at the government level and within civil society. This presents an interesting dilemma for CIDA. What role should IHA play in building the capacity of Canadian NGOs involved in disaster relief?

The evaluation team looked at several issues related to capacity building. First, data was obtained from multilateral agencies by attending a conference in Dominican Republic. This was followed by interviews in Honduras and Nicaragua, and an examination of the capacities of the two countries. Finally, the team explored the capacities of the Canadian government and civil society.

Summary and Lessons Learned

In general, all groups agree that the first responsibility for capacity development rests with the country itself – national governments are responsible for the health and welfare of their citizens. They need to identify needs, coordinate internal and external support, manage distribution systems and so forth. However, we know that in the developing world disaster preparedness is often seen as a luxury rather than a way of protecting assets (Constance 1999). Clearly the international community has a responsibility to support the development of improved capacities to prepare for disaster in poorer nations. In this area CIDA has provided support at several levels. It has supported capacity building as part of the multilateral effort, and this is probably the right approach. However, CIDA has also significantly reduced its funding to these organizations. Working with the global community to help determine how to support preparedness of poor countries is an important role for CIDA IHA.

The question that needs to be addressed is how best to support national interests, a question that becomes more complex when dealing with fledgling democratic states that are poor. During the evaluation we learned of one dilemma facing donors in fledgling countries. In order to provide assistance directly to those in need, donors need to work with local groups. When they do this, however, they undermine the work of national and multilateral agencies.

Coordinating and balancing investments – government, civil society, private sector – is an important part of capacity development. While capacity development is a complex organizational challenge, so are the issues of transparency, power, and self-interest in the various agencies.

In these states, there are no slack resources to support emergency preparedness. There are few trained personnel at the national and local levels to manage disaster relief. In the absence of the state machinery, NGOs fill the void. But NGOs have their own agendas and “baggage”. Thus donors are left with trying to balance a set of competing demands and approaches to capacity development.

Local NGOs are supported (by donors, by Canadian NGOs or INGOs) to put resources on the ground. Canadian NGOs are supported to generate and focus Canadian resources to those most linked to Canadian values. Finally, capacity of government agencies is needed to set the policy parameters and engage in operational activities that neither the country nor our private sector (i.e. NGOs) would engage in.

As a result of our analysis, we recommend that:

12. CIDA IHA work with multilateral agencies to assess the preparedness of nations. This should be fed to bilateral and regional desks.
13. CIDA IHA work with their multilateral partners to assess present intervention strategies and, if necessary, develop more robust capacity building strategies. This probably will require targeted investments by CIDA in these agencies.
14. CIDA IHA develop mechanisms that can support partnerships in improving capacity of Canadian NGOs and private sector firms to respond to disaster by:
 - Creating innovative technologies to respond to disasters (e.g. i2k);
 - Creating an incentive system for rapid response (e.g. pre-purchases, JIT supply system, standing offer);
 - Encouraging NGOs to develop new approaches (more effective and efficient) to humanitarian assistance capacity building in poor countries.

15. CIDA IHA work with Partnership Branch to support Canadian NGOs that want to develop practical emergency preparedness tools, approaches and networks with their partners.
16. CIDA IHA begin to implement its strategy to build Agency capacity in area such as : training on emergency preparedness for new and existing CIDA staff , sharing lessons from its own emergency response experiences as well as other organizations' experiences, disseminating emergency preparedness and response procedures that have been developed, and assessing the extent of disaster readiness that exists across the Agency.

5.4 Knowledge Perspective

Over the last three months, the evaluation team has reviewed current material and lessons learned on disaster relief. We read reports, interviewed a wide assortment of policy and operational personnel in Canada and abroad, and visited several countries (a member of the team even visited ICRC in Geneva). The team learned that there is a growing interest in developing standards for humanitarian work, that there is increasing concern about early warning signs, and that the literature of lessons learned is growing.

But interest and need are not enough – in order to benefit from a knowledge perspective requires at least four interactive elements:

- The ability to generate knowledge about disaster preparedness and response;
- The need to share the knowledge generated;
- The use of that knowledge in practical and realistic ways;
- The need to monitor implementation of the knowledge.

Summary and Lessons Learned

CIDA IHA was able to incorporate earlier experiences in emergency response and use them to improve its response to Hurricane Mitch. The early reconnaissance flight set the stage for Canadian involvement. The ongoing coordination meetings between CIDA and its partners helped target the Canadian response. The ACT allowed Canada to respond in a timely (albeit to some, slower than desired) fashion. The Canadian Red Cross, an organization with extensive experience in humanitarian assistance, coordinated work with other NGOs. The DART provided an effective response in a limited timeframe, although its scope is limited.

In each of these actions, however, a case can be made for improved response. We can and must do more to learn. Indeed, this evaluation is a demonstration of a desire to take a knowledge-based perspective – to learn more.

As a result of our analysis, we recommend that:

17. CIDA IHA continue to develop ways to generate and use knowledge about its current and long-range disaster relief activities. This can be done in a variety of ways and could include hosting forums, round tables, or brown bag lunches with CIDA staff and experienced humanitarian workers and experts.
18. CIDA IHA develop and begin to utilize a set of standards for emergency response practices and procedures. These might be similar to the technical standards developed for other areas such as delivery of health assistance.
19. CIDA support innovative technologies that can generate information and assist coordination, and that CIDA provide resources to assess the effectiveness and relevance of such new technologies.
20. CIDA IHA find effective ways to teach the Canadian public how to respond to disaster. The Canadian public supports humanitarian assistance and IHA needs to use this support to build a better Canadian

knowledge base. This can be done by supporting targeted development education activities and through the innovative use of information technologies such as the Internet.