

Executive Summary

Background

Hurricane Mitch swept through Central America between October 26 and November 2, 1998. The hurricane developed as a tropical storm on October 22, 1998. It intensified in the southern Caribbean over the course of the week and was upgraded to a Category V hurricane on October 27, 1998 (UN, 1999). In Honduras, close to 85% of its territory was under water, the streets of the capital city, Tegucigalpa, were transformed into a network of rushing rivers, and close to 75% of Honduran crops were destroyed. In Nicaragua, a dramatic mudslide buried entire communities. In light of the frequency of large scale humanitarian emergencies in the 1990s (Rwanda 1994; Congo 1996; Hurricane Mitch 1998), it is likely that CIDA will continue to be called upon to respond in a timely manner to complex disasters and to the needs of the most vulnerable populations.

CIDA requested an evaluation in order to assess its emergency response to Hurricane Mitch in Honduras and Nicaragua. The study was undertaken by Universal Management Group to provide CIDA with relevant lessons and recommendations regarding emergency humanitarian relief actions that may inform future actions of this nature.

Methodology

The three principal sources of data for the evaluation were field observations, interviews, and document reviews. Evaluation team members attended the conference *Evaluation of the Preparedness for Hurricanes Georges and Mitch* in the Dominican Republic from February 16th to 19th, 1999 (see Annex I for the summary report from the conference). During a mission to Honduras and Nicaragua from March 7-18, 1999 (see Annex II for the field mission report), personal interviews were conducted with CIDA field representatives and partners, including representatives from international NGOs, from multilateral organizations, other donor organizations, as well as local authorities. CIDA managers in CIDA Hull were interviewed in February and March, as well as individuals from the Department of National Defence (DND) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT). The third source of data was written documents. A range of materials and documents from CIDA Hull, the Red Cross, DND, and others were collected and reviewed. The performance of CIDA's International Humanitarian Assistance (IHA) program was judged by the extent to which it fulfilled its objectives with respect to emergency humanitarian response (e.g. accountability, capacity building, and knowledge creation and use). In general, Hurricane Mitch provided a useful case from which lessons can be learned and recommendations made to CIDA with respect to improving its performance in responding to natural disasters.

Conclusions and recommendations

Overall perspective

CIDA's response was consistent with IHA's mandate and Canadian foreign policy objectives. CIDA's assistance eased the suffering of victims of Hurricane Mitch, and was appropriate to the conditions and needs of those populations. It was a good intervention.

IHA's efforts would not have been successful without the cooperation, effort and coordination of a wide assortment of partners. CIDA's work can only be assessed within the context of these partnerships:

- 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).

While CIDA's and Canada's humanitarian response to Mitch was commendable, it did raise important issues with respect to the decision-making process that leads CIDA to decide on the amount it invests in both humanitarian relief work and follow-up reconstruction.

Recommendation – In order to improve the funding framework, we recommend that IHA develop a framework for both governance and operations within which decisions can be made regarding the appropriate level of humanitarian assistance and how this is presented to the Canadian public.

Accountability perspective

The CIDA effort and response was judged to be good. However, we found that CIDA staff shortages and the lack of preparedness of the two affected countries, Honduras and Nicaragua, inhibited the ability of IHA to respond in a timely and appropriate manner.

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

- Engage in a staffing analysis 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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
- 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
- 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
- Work with multilateral agencies to develop some standards/indicators for humanitarian response (timeliness, appropriateness)
- 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

Capacity Perspective

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. We conclude that CIDA must work with its Canadian partners to build a Canadian response to support the attempts of targeted countries (developing countries and other CIDA targets) to build their capacity

Recommendation – In order to improve its capacity building perspective, we recommend that IHA:

- Work with multilateral agencies to assess the preparedness of nations. This should be fed to bilateral and regional desks.
- 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.
- Develop mechanisms that can support partnerships in improving the 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 to humanitarian assistance capacity building in poor countries
- Work with Partnership Branch to support Canadian NGOs that want to develop practical emergency preparedness tools, approaches and networks with their partners.
- Begin to implement its strategy to build Agency capacity in areas 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.

Knowledge Perspective

CIDA IHA was able to incorporate its earlier experiences in emergency response 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.

Recommendation – As a result of our analysis, we recommend that 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

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