



Country in the Spotlight: Some Lessons from Post-Disaster Response – Suriname

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Suriname experienced disastrous flooding in various interior areas in May 2006, affecting approximately 22,000 persons from indigenous (Amerindian) and tribal African descendants (Maroons) in scattered villages in the rainforest and displacing hundreds of families. Although the floods were not a huge humanitarian tragedy per se, the impact on development in these already marginalized communities is substantive in terms of food security, housing and economic self-sufficiency.

Coordinated disaster response



Since the onset, there was an effective and well-coordinated disaster response, including many individuals and existing NGOs volunteering to help. The National Coordination Center for Disaster Control (NCCR), the government arm for disaster management, acted quickly in mobilizing operational and logistical mechanisms to deliver essentials and coordinate the various international and national actors involved. UNDP was especially involved in supporting the general overall coordination activities of the NCCR, liaising with the international community within Suriname and also supporting the recovery planning phase of the disaster. Within the first two days of the emergency, a donor coordination platform was established on UNDP's initiative. Chaired by UNDP, it continued to facilitate coordination and liaison with the NCCR throughout the emergency by bringing together all bilateral and multilateral organizations supporting the emergency response.

Lessons Learned:



As Suriname moves on towards longer-term recovery and sustainable development planning, there are some lessons learned and good practices that can be shared. One of the critical factors for the effectiveness of disaster response was the leadership of the National Coordination Center for Disaster Control (NCCR). Under its strong leadership, the NCCR was able to call on and mobilize existing operational and logistical infrastructures - including the National Army, Police Corps and Fire Brigade - and coordinate various actors, ranging from Ministries, NGOs, regional bodies and structures, volunteers, donors to international experts and assessment teams. Multidisciplinary and multi-stakeholder working groups were set up by NCCR to address the various critical situations regarding food and water, shelter, health and sanitation. The main lessons from this is that **such coordination centers need to have sufficient room and mandate to act effectively and efficiently and have the ability to call on existing bodies and mechanisms or quickly effectuate (temporary) new ones, if necessary.** Further, the international community needs to 'buy in' to the national response in order to facilitate a coherent and effective response. Setting up the donor

coordination platform by UNDP ensured that there was dialogue and compromise on the part of bilateral and multilateral organizations. It also ensured that information could be channeled between the NCCR and the international community through a 'one window' system, thereby minimizing the burden placed on NCCR resources for this purpose.

Considering the large number of parties involved in the disaster response, **it is important to ensure a sufficient level of information exchange and coordination of activities among all the involved stakeholders and sectors.** Efficient information exchange ensures that all actors involved have the bigger picture of the disaster response and facilitates individuals to take action within the bigger context and coordinate more effectively. Other elements of success included developing early an easily recognizable template for status/situation reports (e.g. the UN template) to facilitate initial international assistance and managing media relations to ensure transparency and to keep the general public informed.



One critical lesson is to **respect the cultural particularities of involved indigenous and tribal peoples to ensure smooth implementation and local support.** The current disaster response tried to give due respect by being conscious in the choice and packaging of food items, distributing goods locally with support from community leaders and Community Based-Organizations (CBOs) and timing the distribution of shelter materials. However, **it is important to recognize that tribal leaders had evacuation procedures in place (reflecting past local flooding experiences) and that the disaster response by NCCR should have taken the locally established procedures more into account.** Although this did not lead to major disruptions, national coordinating bodies should be conscious to and respect such local processes.

Moving forward towards recovery

As it is now few months after the disaster, Suriname is phasing out of the crisis phase and moving on towards longer-term recovery. The emergency operations (with the exception of food distribution to the hardest hit areas) were terminated by end of August. The NCCR is now in the process of an evaluation of the operations and coordination mechanisms, and is also undertaking actions, with technical and financial support from UNDP and partners, to strengthen its own capacity. This may include a 'coordination audit' to be undertaken with the support of UNDAC.

New challenges are emerging. It is a challenge to keep all the stakeholders together under an alternative umbrella in non-critical circumstances. The exit strategy of NCCR was facilitated by the medium and longer-term workplan developed by different working groups on food, health, water and sanitation and shelter. To build on the positive experience of multidisciplinary and multi-stakeholder coordination, the **Ministry of Regional Development**, supported by UNDP, has convened a stakeholder workshop to develop a roadmap for a broader development planning process and to install a multi-

stakeholder coordination group. The coordination group will be informed by the outcomes of an impact assessment according to the ECLAC methodology, scheduled for October 2006. Meanwhile recovery and early reconstruction efforts are being undertaken by the communities themselves, Government and NGOs.