

8. Another key hindrance in the process was obtaining a Cuban visa. At that time the situation of diplomatic relationships between the Cuban Government and the EU delayed the authorization of the mission considerably. Nevertheless, after a strong coordination effort, a two week mission to Cuba took place.

1.2 Purpose and Methodology

9. Article 18 of Regulation (EC) 1257/96 establishes that the “Commission shall regularly assess humanitarian aid operations financed by the Community in order to establish whether they have achieved their objectives and to produce guidelines for improving the effectiveness of subsequent operations”.

10. Furthermore, Article 7 of the regulation states that administrative, financial, technical and logistical capacities and experience, among other factors, shall be taken into account for the determination of a non-governmental organization's suitability for Community funding.

11. Following this mandate, the evaluation has been appointed with the purpose of assessing *the appropriateness of DIPECHO's actions, in accordance with ECHO's mandate, in order to establish whether they have achieved their objectives, they have pertinent strategies and finally to produce recommendations by country within the regional, national and local context, depending on the conclusions, for an exit strategy or for improving the effectiveness of future operations in the Caribbean region.*

12. The evaluation methodology consisted in:

- an analysis of relevant information in ECHO's headquarters in Brussels, as well as interviews with key personnel of ECHO 1, 3 and 4;
- a profound desk study of the program information available in the Santo Domingo Regional Office, as well as interviews and consultation with their staff;
- selection of particular projects, partners and countries to be visited, with the advice of the Santo Domingo office³;
- field visits to projects: Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Saint Lucia and Dominica , Dominican Republic, Haiti, Barbados and Cuba;
- application of the partner's evaluation appraisal forms provided by ECHO Evaluation, in a strong participatory fashion (utilization-led approach);

³ It was considered impossible in the given timeframe to visit all projects of the four action plans and therefore a selection had to be made.

- the development of different levels of analysis (global, operational and sectoral) according to the Terms of Reference; and
- the presentation of the report in a debriefing meeting in Brussels.

1.3 Main Conclusions

13. Even though institutional commitment and reinforcement at the regional and national level is increasing, it is still far from adequately responding to the concrete needs of communities, population and civil society. In general there are some indications of improvement in institutional capacities, but scope for communities' resilience and capability to cope with disaster is still quite low. The impact of the top-bottom approach mainly based on institutional strengthening will take a long time to affect community needs and it also faces unpredictable political risks.

14. Programmes that directly support communities and their basic organizations (bottom – up approach) have proved to be the better way for immediate reinforcement of coping and resilience capacities.

15. DIPECHO is not only oriented towards a specific and vital need, but has also found a niche, which is not covered by any other international agency with the same level of profoundness. The DIPECHO programme is pertinent and appropriate with regards to the regional situation.

16. ECHO at the moment is rather the only agency to fund community based Disaster Preparedness (CBDP) in all the countries of the region. Regarding the high and growing level of national and local vulnerability, and the still unconsolidated governmental prevention and mitigation policies, disaster preparedness has a high **relevance** for the vulnerable population.

17. The question of whether or not coping strategies of the affected population were supported by ECHO-financed interventions can definitely be answered affirmatively.

18. The DIPECHO action plan IV did support the preparedness of communities and mainly developed the following activities:

- organization of Community Disaster Response Committees;
- creation of functional teams responsible for the preparation and the implementation of immediate responsive action in case of disaster, i.e. evacuation, shelter management, transport, nutrition, education etc;
- training of community members and staff of public institutions (mainly National Disaster Organizations (NDO)/civil defence, municipality, Water and Meteorological offices);