

1 Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction¹

1. The Caribbean Region is highly prone to disaster, mainly to hurricanes and recurrent flood events. On some islands, volcanic activity is also a hazard. Additionally, socioeconomic factors are decisive in accounting for its high vulnerability: high population density, high annual demographic growth, high levels of poverty and socioeconomic inequality. All these factors combined result in the formation of extremely vulnerable groups of the population with little coping or resilience capacities in the event of a disaster.

2. Since 1995, ECHO has allocated approximately € million for disaster related response in the region. Considering this recurrent problem –frequent disaster strikes and then ECHO’s necessary reaction– disaster preparedness becomes an activity of paramount importance for the institution.

3. In 2003, ECHO called for a better definition and distribution of risk reduction activities among the external services of the Commission (between DEV/AIDCO and ECHO). Consequently, ECHO will henceforth focus on preparedness activities in areas already affected by natural disaster or neglected by authorities. DEV/AIDCO however will support programmes that are implemented more efficiently at national or regional level, where appropriate disaster management institutions are involved.

4. A first overall evaluation in 2000² allowed for a better definition of the strategies and has confirmed the relevance of the programme.

5. After four successive plans in the Caribbean region, ECHO considered it adequate to analyze the relevance of the orientation as well as the impact of the programme. With that purpose in mind, an evaluation has been carried out through AGE G e.G. from Germany.

6. For strategic reasons of timeframe and logistics, the consultants visited the projects and countries separately. In coordination with the Santo Domingo regional office, a certain number of projects and countries were chosen.

7. The whole evaluation process was strongly affected by the hurricane season. Two major cyclones had hit the islands, and relevant interview partners in the region were preoccupied with immediate response and rehabilitation. The majority of visits were characterized by a tense situation in which key persons to be interviewed were otherwise occupied, too tired to respond to questions or unavailable. For the same reason it has been impossible to organize the planned country workshops with stakeholders, with the exception of the Dominican Republic.

¹ Information based on the Evaluation Terms of Reference.

² First DIPECHO evaluation in the Caribbean, contract No ECHO/EVA/2000/0100

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);

- elaboration of vulnerability and capacity maps;
- elaboration of community emergency plans and in some cases household emergency plans; and
- in some cases installation of early warning systems and organization of community based groups able to maintain these systems.

19. Although it is difficult to measure the impact of these activities because of the different character and consequently different impact of any disaster and because of a lack of clear indicators of measurement yet to be developed, experience has shown that the above-mentioned elements are the most essential to guarantee an effective reduction of loss of lives.

20. With the implementation of the CBDP projects, DIPECHO IV has found its niche. The projects meet essential needs, and their methodology and techniques are consistent with local organization and culture. They are highly accepted among the target population. Related institutions and local staff have been trained and can be employed in future projects.

21. Micro-projects (mainly drainage, reforestation, small protection works) serve as a medium to support preparedness activities. Although encountering various difficulties during implementation, they had an overall positive effect. They raised acceptance of DPP within the population and thus facilitated the sensibilization and mobilization of the communities. Partners specifically appreciate their pedagogic effect: through the micro-project people learn that effective mitigation can be achieved with limited resources thus reducing their vulnerability.

22. Early warning systems (EWS), when simple and easy to maintain by communal groups, are very efficient tools for the reinforcement of coping capacities as they allow for timely evacuations.

23. ECHO's time limit for project financing (12-18 months) clearly indicates that expectations on sustainability of financed operations cannot be too high. A "project approach" with this limited time frame yet with ambitious and complex objectives cannot be realistic, if it does not contribute to the local actors' objectives and if it is not linked to a long term partner in the intervention area. Partners' proposals should clearly identify those contributions as well as the sustainability criteria.

24. Some of the projects, in particular the UNDP radar project, and MOVIMONDO in the Dominican Republic, included components of high technology scientific studies (seismic micro zonification, flood modelling, etc) or high technology EWS (radars, telemetric systems, etc) that could hardly be absorbed, or even operated by the type of beneficiaries towards which the projects were oriented. On the contrary, Cuban projects have included technological solutions adequate to beneficiaries' capacities for operation, maintenance and development.

25. In general, projects are not adequately considering the aspects of replication, and integration into partners' and beneficiaries' activities.

26. Limited success in replication and dissemination is resulting from the partnership concept itself. Projects that are isolated from the partners' core activities can hardly be replicated. In cases where partners are not willing to replicate or disseminate the experiences even within their own organization, it is highly unlikely that they will start to do so in the projects.

1.4 Recommendations

27. DIPECHO's distinct identity and niche should be preserved. It is vital to avoid overcharging the program with expectations and responsibilities belonging to other actors or structures of the EC. DIPECHO should continue to be a budget line that supports community capacities for coping and resilience, through non-governmental actors.

28. ECHO should strengthen its advocacy pillar, and establish a clear strategy with necessary resources. This strategy should be established at all levels of EC operations: central (for policy making, follow up, planning, and evaluation), regional and national. It is strongly recommended that the Santo Domingo office initiative for a "*Regional ECHO Strategy*" should be continued and consolidated.

29. DPP should be inserted better than at present into the agenda of development services of the EC. Delegations should be asked to carry out an annual situation analysis and issue strategic recommendations. Procedures should be developed to define communication and cooperation between ECHO's regional offices and delegations (regular strategy consultations, meetings etc.).

30. Risk reduction criteria need to be included into the formulation of related development projects (especially of infrastructure, rural and urban development, poverty relief etc).

31. For all these reasons it is highly recommended that the programme be continued until national institutions and the international community include the subject in their agenda and until the achieved results are consolidated.

32. An additional result should be required from the partners (and be included into the calls for proposal): an assessment of existing local and national institutional structures and capacities as well as a plan which contains proposals on how to develop a follow up of the projects, in order to consolidate them and guarantee their sustainability.

33. CBDP projects should therefore include in their activities, to a higher degree than in DIPECHO IV, EWS in communities that are prone to sudden floods. Calls for proposals should encourage partners for the application of EWS in their projects.

34. DIPECHO should give priority to mid- or long-term activities, making use of the partner's work plan in the countries. The achievement of planned objectives and results, management of time constraints and follow up would then be possible.

35. Funded activities must strictly strike a balance between technological tools and local capacities for their best operation and maintenance. Countries and partners should be encouraged to integrate projects with higher technological requirements in their proposals for DG DEV or other international community actors.

36. The partnership concept should be redefined. The evaluation has shown that this relationship is not fully adequate for the programme needs. A potential capacity to develop and implement DPP projects is not sufficient to become a DIPECHO's partner. Participation of *Development NGOs* should be encouraged.

37. The partnership concept should include the concern of replication and dissemination. Partners should not be treated and think of themselves as mere sub contractors or implementers of the projects; instead they should also feel responsible for the achievement of DIPECHO program goals.

38. The partnership should be based on the complementarity between DIPECHO and the organizations, and agreements should clearly identify and establish common objectives, specific strategies and methodologies developed, and common investments.

39. Conditions and capacities to replicate and extend CDBP to a wider range of vulnerable communities should be analyzed. As an additional project result, a concept for this extension should be developed. Partner's proposals should clearly identify how replication to other communities could be addressed in terms of methodology, systematisation, and institutional needs. The monitoring and evaluation process should produce guidelines and orientations to other actors (institutions, NGOs and community based organisations previously identified) for the continuation and eventual expansion of the experience.

40. Activities that reinforce partners' strategies and specific plans in the scope of DIPECHO will have priority. It means that in potential calls for proposals, those oriented to complement midterm intervention projects merit particular attention. Partners will be encouraged to present proposals with this orientation.

1.5 Guidelines for ECHO's DPP strategy

41. DIPECHO's strategy will be based on the following axis:

42. Supporting community based and non-governmental actors. Funded projects should be restricted to community based organizations and non-governmental partners. Nevertheless, the liaison with national and local institutions (such as Municipalities, National Emergency Organizations, National Meteorological Services) should not be neglected.

43. Supporting programme components and strategic operations instead of projects. DIPECHO should give priority to already identified mid or long-term programs, that are

part of the partner's work plans in the countries. Consequently, objective achievement and flexibility for managing time constraints will be the partner's main responsibility.

44. Impact measured on indicators developed by partners or beneficiaries. Activities supported by DIPECHO will be evaluated in terms of their contribution to the local actors' objectives. Partner's proposals should clearly identify those contributions as well as the sustainability criteria.

45. Avoid technological dependency. Activities supported should observe a strict balance between technological tools and local capacities for their operation and maintenance.

46. The scope of action will be oriented as follows:

47. Vulnerability and geographical priorities; the funding should continue to support projects in high-risk level communities where capacities for coping with disaster can be strengthened at community level. Action plans should consider recent impacts and give priority to communities with lesser capacities for coping and resilience, due to disaster strikes.

48. For a new plan, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica should be prioritized for project implementation. Small islands with high volcanic activity should also be considered when necessary.

49. National institutional capacities and support to decentralized response: the programme should prioritize countries where governmental commitment with community preparedness is still weak. DIPECHO's capacity to respond directly at the grassroot level is more important for communities where expectations of institutional support are still very low. This should not become an incentive for lower institutional commitment, but should be regarded as a special attention to those with fewer possibilities to survive and cope.

50. Partner's proposals or strategies: projects that are part of a larger operation of the partner should have more weight in the process of approval.

51. The regional plan of the International Federation of the Red Cross should be strongly supported; based on the partnership aspects that will be discussed afterwards.

52. Permanent situation analysis: ECHO should undertake regular and updated analysis of the regional situation. Windows of opportunity that are usually opened after disaster strikes, political agreements and government changes can open up or close possibilities for action. Considering the 12-18 months interventions span, a flexible approach guided by the regional situation should be possible.

53. Thematic Priorities: Considering regional conditions of risk, DIPECHO should pay attention to specific aspects where they can have a significant impact. Two thematic considerations shall be prioritized: Rapid urban growth in the Caribbean; Floods and Hurricanes.

54. The partnership basis should be re-established: The new partnership shall be built on the basis of actual operations, plans and objectives. Partners should be actively involved in DPP in the countries willing to be supported. The absence of DPP in partners' development or strategic plans should be a criterion for exclusion. Partners that are not directly working on DPP, transversally or specifically, should not be supported by DIPECHO funds.

55. Activities that reinforce partner's strategies and specific plans in the scope of DIPECHO will have priority.

56. Taking advantage of differences in partners' profiles, DIPECHO's strategy should be based on operational plans that take note of this situation, and exploit it. The Red Cross movement and "well networked NGOs" should be approached in that sense.

57. ECHO should develop an advocacy strategy, which should be mainstreamed in DEV operations. Experience of DG RELEX could be utilized as an aid to decision-making, in order to promote similar activities for the Caribbean Region. ECHO should start with the development of an analysis of the main sectoral and regional investment and cooperation strategies, in order to identify possibilities, opportunities, and needs for the integration of risk reduction criteria into development operations.

58. A toolkit for the mainstreaming of DPP into Development should be elaborated, in an ECHO/DG DEV joint effort. It should contain checklists and guidelines for project formulators, in order to facilitate the design process. Delegations should also give support in the negotiations for National Action Plans.

59. Advocacy actions should draw on DIPECHO's lessons and experiences. As a result of lessons learned from monitoring and evaluation processes, methodologies and implementation tools should be adapted in order to better select and design the advocacy activities to be promoted by the decision-making process.

1.6 Lessons Learned

60. Each visit and analysis of a DIPECHO project yields important lessons that should be systematized by the partners, and shared with the "DIPECHO Community". In an effort to sum up some of the main and common factors/elements, the following issues are set out:

1. The Community-based preparedness approach becomes an efficient tool for the strengthening of the population's coping capacities. Short time scale interventions, low-level technology and a strong participatory approach have proved to be successful in reducing the loss of lives. This lesson should be a beacon for national and international risk and disaster reduction strategies.

2. Working at community level requires a balance between direct intervention with end users and population and – at least – a minimum of coordination with official / governmental institutions. Precisely, what this minimum coordination will be like is directly proportional to Governmental commitment to their own communities. Ignoring or bypassing the governmental institutions, even if it is for the sake of projects' efficiency, will sooner or later become a menace for continuation and sustainability.
3. Community-based disaster preparedness projects in general – and DIPECHO's in particular – should be developed in a partnership of local instances and community groups with international actors that have experience and vast knowledge of the stakeholders' reality and capacities. Ad-hoc interventions, with international NGOs inexperienced in the context with limited access could be neither sustainable nor replicable.
4. CDBP projects should be implemented through partners working at local and communal bases. International or regional organizations, even if they are totally valid and important actors in the DPP promotion context, do not have the best profile for this type of project execution.
5. Technology should neither be excessively praised nor neglected. Every intervention should develop a deep analysis of the technological level suitable for each particular case and counterpart. Cuban projects have shown that the use of a well-dosed level of technology could be successful, while other projects – with good institutional and financial possibilities –failed in the application of technology for CDBP.
6. Regional exchange of experiences, dissemination, replicability or development of common tools or technical solutions (considering comparative advantages and complementarity) cannot be duly addressed by the inclusion of a *last result* in project proposals. In the projects' time frame and with the conditions that partners face (often isolated of regional activities) it is difficult to achieve these types of objectives. Regional institutions (CEPREDENAC, CDERA) dynamics, where exchange is one of the main lines of work, show that this objective requires a specific approach, budget and coordination efforts.