



AmericasRelief Team

Comments made on December 5, 2007 at the 31st Miami Conference on The Caribbean-Disaster Responsiveness Workshop by Dr. Teo A. Babun Jr., Executive Director of AmericasRelief Team.

THE CARIBBEAN BASIN SHOULD CREATE A WORLD MODEL OF PREPAREDNESS AGAINST NATURAL DISASTERS

AmericasRelief Team recognize that unless the countries in the Caribbean Basin intensify their efforts in mitigation and preparedness to protect the poor, they are then destined to depend on charity from United States agencies such as USAID, the U.S. Army, large, mostly US based NGOs, and other international organizations to activate relief efforts following weather or man-made disasters, and destructive hurricanes

The challenge to the Caribbean region is to put aside ideology and develop responsible policy, and become serious, with plans & governmental budgets to deal with preparedness and responsible building codes; to become a model of preparedness against natural disasters.

The problem

At the heart of all humanitarian relief strategies are two priorities: saving lives and reducing human suffering, so after a devastating natural disaster, such as this year's Hurricane Felix, which slammed into the coast of Nicaragua and Honduras, aid groups in the US responded with donated supplies or from inventories of strategically located warehouses. Larger volumes of support were provided by USAID, and the U.N from regional warehouses. But all struggled to get the aid to where they were needed.

What follows after disasters like this is often chaos, with every organization doing its own thing to get relief supplies to the victims. Helicopters from neighboring countries sent to provide assistance usually run out of fuel, and the US Southern Command, which is repeatedly undermined, comes to the rescue.

When dozens of aid groups and governments fly-in shipments, each one becoming responsible for unloading its own planes, it is not surprising that piles of relief supplies block the airport's tarmac as a result, ports get jammed with containers full of aid without proper documentations, or a consignee to receive it, or because the aid group forgot to raise funds to pay for the customs duties.

The more chaotic the conditions become, the more likely it will be that the rule of unintended consequences will apply and that humanitarian relief programming will get drawn into the chaos or even aggravate it if not properly designed.

Recommendations

The people in the Caribbean and Central America suffer unnecessarily because these logistics problems can not be solved in the middle of the crises. Only better preparation can help mitigate some of these problems to get aid to the victims quicker and more efficiently.

Some possible solutions include:

- Staging critical relief supplies in fast response regional warehouses, with a supply of most needed items such as: water purification tablets, wool blankets, tents & plastic sheeting.
- Developing shipping & distribution protocols for non-perishable and medical relief supplies, and
- Providing an organized and secure distribution system.

Much can be done, but small steps such as these can help move forward the main objective of developing the capacity to provide quick response.

Americas Relief

Americas Relief Team was created by corporations and non profit organizations to help our friends in the Caribbean Basin in times of crisis and disasters. We are applying logistics techniques and personal knowledge to help bring order to the inefficient world of disaster relief. Last year we introduced a program to coordinate relief cargo space available from air and ocean cargo carriers operating in the Caribbean,

When disaster strikes, the Team works together in a coordinated basis with the Caribbean Basin government, the U.S. government, donating corporations, air & sea cargo carriers, NGO experts and others to effectively channel emergency relief to the most affected areas.

Summary

Natural disasters are common occurrences in the Caribbean Basin. Therefore, disaster management should be seen as a development problem by the countries in the region. The countries in the Caribbean Basin can become a world model of preparedness against natural disasters by:

- Creating responsible hurricane preparedness policy
- Creating anti-hurricane building codes & standards
- Reducing mitigating bureaucracy
- Formulating formal collaboration efforts
- Budgeting for best practices
- Creating fast response warehouses throughout the country
- Instigating effective education & communication programs
- Establishing shipping and distribution protocols

For more information to learn more about **AmericasRelief** Team, please visit www.americasrelief.org.