Possibilities and difficulties regarding DRR in a local context: lessons from Honduras after hurricane Mitch

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*Sida’s Seminar on Disaster Risk Reduction:*

*A necessary means to reduce poverty*

Stockholm 23 of October, 2007
For 7 days: intense winds and prolonged rainfall pound the region
Torrents of floodwater drag enormous amounts of earth, mud and debris, houses, roads and bridges.
In Honduras:

5,700 died + 8,000 disappeared
90 main bridges collapsed and hundreds of kilometres of main roads were destroyed.
50,000 houses were severely damaged or destroyed
1,700 water systems were damaged
Communications were severely damaged.
Main airports were flooded
70% of agriculture land became unproductive;
US$ 3.8 billion in loses
Mitch occurred when the region was

- Regaining hope after decades of internal conflicts, violence and economic crisis
- Dedicating efforts to consolidate peace, democracy and sustainable development.

→ This gave birth to massive solidarity effort from all the world (including Stockholm Conference and Declaration in May 1999)
Social vulnerability resulted from:

- Rapid population and urban growth;
- Disparities in access to wealth and land;
- Inadequate infrastructure and services;
- Corruption and lack of transparency;
- Environmental degradation;
- Lack of adequate policies and systems;
What lessons learned from the Mitch process are important in terms of DRR:

- During immediate relief and rehabilitation period
- During reconstruction period
- During development period
Rehabilitation Period: Difficulties and possibilities

Nobody had clear criteria to determine who was affected and who was eligible for assistance:

- *Rely on existing NGOs + CBOs working there before Mitch*
- *Do not ignore and underestimate local governments knowledge and capacities*
- *Do not supplant them, assist them!*
Difficulties and possibilities: From disaster to 6 months

No clear criteria for deciding on temporary versus permanent housing solutions:

- Rapid appraisals with CBOs, NGOs + local governments on land, services & housing physical conditions

- Try to answer three main questions:
  - Can family go back?
  - If not, why not?
  - Can something be done so they can go back?
Reconstruction Period
6-12 months

- Suitable and uncontested land for resettlement was scarce:
  - Not everyone has to move to new settlement
  - Think that probably majority can rebuild *in situ*

- Difficulties deciding who has to do what and who leads the provision and operation of infrastructure and services:
  - Incremental settlement development
  - Incremental provision of services + housing
  - Avoid huge settlements in cities peripheries far away from livelihoods
Reconstruction Period:
6-12 months

- Systems for evaluating projects and issuing environmental permits was slow and conditions difficult to comply
  - One step forward - two steps backward
  - Use donor coordination leverage for change!

- Planning, construction standards and codes where not adequate for reconstruction
  - Use reconstruction to question and transform
Reconstruction Period: 6-12 months

- Some International NGOs arrived with little or no prior experience in the country and in housing
  - One of the most difficult problems to deal with!
  - Assist national + local governments not to reject but to set limits for aid!

- Competition for donor resources, land and even access to potential beneficiaries
  - Wait until the ‘waters go back to normal’

- Introduction of schemes that generated passivity among recipients (all free);
  - Use combination of loans, self-help and subsidies
  - Do not try to do what everyone is doing bad!
Reconstruction Period: 6-12 months

- Conflicts between poor affected by Mitch and historically excluded poor not affected by Mitch:
  - Take both of them into account
  - The more you mix the better results you get
  - Heterogenous not homogenous settlements

- Difficulties to reflect seriously on what is happening during first year.
  - Promote dialogue between donor community, civil society and government
  - Define and agree indicators of success and failure
Post-reconstruction period: use process for transformation

- Address key issues evident before Mitch
- Institutional transformation: PVMR + PRIMHUR \( \Rightarrow \) FUNDEVI (government to non government)
- Use financial schemes that will continue in time
  - Revolving housing loan schemes
- Harmonize approaches, procedures and reporting routines with donors
- Try to influence reconstruction policies
- Provide institutional strengthening to key actors
- Think not the emergency but 10 years ahead.