Rebuilding homes and livelihoods in Jamaica after Hurricane Dean

Background

On 19 August 2007, Hurricane Dean caused major destruction to Jamaica as a category 4 hurricane. Its winds caused extensive damage to infrastructure and property along the eastern and southern Jamaican coastline.

The Jamaica Red Cross Society carried out ten assessment missions between 21 and 22 August in coordination with members of other humanitarian organizations operating on the ground. The assessments identified 3,272 destroyed houses, 16,650 houses with major damage, and 18,053 houses with minor damage. In total 160,000 people were affected and four people died as a result of the hurricane. Flooding was limited to eastern Jamaica, where the ground had become saturated by rain the previous week, severely affecting the banana crop.

The Jamaica Red Cross Society had pre-positioned non-food emergency relief items throughout the country for immediate distribution and Red Cross volunteers distributed food and drinking water during the assessments. The Jamaica Red Cross Society quickly identified the need for additional relief supplies from the International Federation to reach over 1,200 families.

During the weeks following the hurricane, the Jamaica Red Cross Society began the process of evaluating the longer-term needs of the affected population. It started to plan recovery activities focusing on the rebuilding and repairing of homes, and on providing livelihood support to farmers and fisherfolk.

The recovery programme

The Jamaica Red Cross Society and its partners collaborated on a number of housing reconstruction and livelihoods assistance projects targeting the social and economic recovery of those households most affected by Hurricane Dean.

Rebuilding and repairing homes was a priority. The Jamaica Red Cross Society and French Red Cross initiated a one-week joint assessment process to gather damage data related to shelters in order to support an application for funding from the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Department (ECHO). The process built on the detailed knowledge that the Red Cross branch staff and volunteers had of the affected communities and served to verify needs, map vulnerability and damage, and prepare beneficiary lists.

With the support of the Inter-American Development Bank, the Federation, the French Red Cross and ECHO, the Jamaica Red Cross Society successfully constructed 111 homes and repaired 85 roofs.

In November 2007, the Jamaica Red Cross Society started its livelihood support activities, which provided:
- agricultural assistance to 107 farmers
- fishing nets and lines to 218 fishermen
- poultry start-up supplies to 239 poultry farmers
- other small business assistance to 21 beneficiaries

The Jamaican Red Cross Society worked closely with a number of associations who provided advice on livelihoods support as well as assistance in identifying beneficiaries. The partnership with the fisherman’s cooperative and the...
banana cooperative helped the National Society understand livelihood needs for specific groups.

The project provided cash vouchers to selected beneficiaries. For the fisherfolk, these could be redeemed against fishing nets, pots and boat repair materials. For the poultry farmers, the vouchers were redeemable for chicks, feed and medicines. For the farmers, the cash vouchers could be redeemed for fast growing vegetable seeds, such as carrots, tomatoes and string beans, and for fertiliser. The vouchers could be redeemed from established suppliers with whom the Jamaica Red Cross Society had signed a formal agreement.

The Jamaica Red Cross Society also made small financial contributions to six families to replenish the stocks of their small subsistence sidewalk vending businesses. This allowed the families to purchase items lost in the hurricane and to restart livelihood activities that would support their families. A partnership with local businesses provided training to sidewalk vendors in small-scale financial management. People who had lost their livelihoods were also offered training sessions in alternative skills such as photography and hairdressing.

**Partnerships**

The Jamaica Red Cross Society and French Red Cross invested time early on in the disaster response process to analyse their different organizational cultures and the boundaries and challenges that an operational partnership would involve. The two organizations worked effectively together to establish a shelter recovery partnership using ECHO funds.

The French Red Cross support included capacity building for the Jamaica Red Cross in project management knowledge and skills in managing shelter reconstruction. The operational agreement between the two partners provided an opportunity for the Jamaican Red Cross Society staff to develop new skills in managing donor funds, and the partnership has produced training materials and project manuals to assist other staff in the future.

The Jamaica Red Cross Society partnerships with the fisherman’s cooperative and the banana cooperative helped the National Society to understand the livelihood recovery needs for specific groups, as well as target their support more effectively to the most vulnerable.

The partnership between the Jamaica Red Cross Society and the disaster affected communities were critical to the success of the recovery programme. The Jamaica Red Cross Society used an external consultancy to carry out
a beneficiary satisfaction survey. The survey asked the beneficiaries what their perceptions were of the National Society and of the support they received following Hurricane Dean. They were asked about their understanding of the recovery decision making processes, and who should receive support and what type of support the National Society should provide. The survey provided communities with a platform for raising concerns and it provided the Jamaica Red Cross Society with positive and constructive feedback that it can build upon.

**Lessons learnt**

- The Jamaica Red Cross Society was able to include recovery planning from the onset of the disaster. The National Society took advantage of new guidelines for assessment in emergencies and International Federation emergency assessment form that introduces recovery concepts at an early stage and encourages planning for both relief and recovery interventions.

- The Jamaica Red Cross Society effectively used its Community Disaster Response Teams (CDRTs) to link preparedness, response and recovery efforts. These established teams are embedded in communities and play a critical role in providing immediate disaster response. Strengthening the relationship with the community, through a skilled cadre of volunteers and staff, can improve the quality of information available prior to a disaster and aid in the timely assessment of needs following a disaster. Following Hurricane Dean, CDRTs helped design appropriate recovery programme interventions and assisted with the selection of beneficiaries.

- Established partnerships also require maintenance. The effective standing partnership between the Jamaica Red Cross Society and UNICEF was tested during the Hurricane Dean response as precious time was taken by both organisations to understand each others working modalities for disaster relief. It was also sometimes difficult for the Jamaica Red Cross Society to meet everyone’s expectations of them, for example individuals were referred top the Jamaica Red Cross Society by the government for support and assistance at the time when the National Society was focussed on assessments and planning. It was recognised that strong partnerships before a disaster strikes helps to manage expectations.

- The Jamaica Red Cross Society and the French Red Cross invested time in analysing how their partnership would work, particularly given the differences in organisational culture and communications. The two organizations agreed upon
an innovative arrangement whereby the French Red Cross team was incorporated into the organisational framework of the Jamaica Red Cross Society with the French Red Cross Team Leader reporting directly to the Director General of the Jamaica Red Cross Society. This arrangement proved successful for the transfer of knowledge and skills between the two organisations.

Tameka’s story

Tameka Isree is 25 years old and the mother of a 7-year-old son. Tameka’s husband lives away as he tries to secure work in factories. He sends money and visits when he can. Tameka’s mother and husband help Tameka and her son with the basic essentials such as food and school transport. During the hurricane, Tameka and her son took shelter with relatives.

Both Tameka and her mother live in the village of Quarry Hill, one of the villages where the Jamaica Red Cross Society is building houses and replacing damaged roofs. Tameka’s mother owns the plot where the two houses are located. Tameka tried unsuccessfully to find support from the Jamaican government, however, based on the damage assessment, the Jamaica Red Cross Society offered to replace the roof on Tameka’s house. It soon became clear that the one-room house had sustained extensive damage, making it dangerous to attach a new hurricane-resistant roof. After further assessment, the Jamaica Red Cross Society decided to build Tameka a new house.

Tameka feels very lucky. The Jamaica Red Cross Society’s commitment to reducing future risk means that the house has hurricane-resistant technology which makes Tameka feel safe. Although it did not come with the typical Jamaican verandah or a toilet, Tameka has plans to add both of these once she starts her business.

Community participation in the recovery programme is critical for success.

- The use of specialist technical advisors was particularly useful for the recovery assessments. The Jamaica Red Cross Society benefited from the advice of a former government agricultural worker and representatives from the fisherman’s cooperative and banana cooperative, who assisted with assessing livelihoods needs. Their knowledge and technical skills enabled the Jamaica Red Cross to target beneficiaries more effectively. Finding ways of learning from people in specific sectors can be beneficial in terms of sustainability, targeting, greater beneficiary participation, and minimizing duplication of efforts.

- The Jamaica Red Cross also benefited from the advice of building experts. This added value to the shelter assessments and strengthened the process of beneficiary identification. It also demonstrated to local communities that a robust process for decision-making was in place, in which social needs and technical factors were considered side by side. The Jamaica shelter reconstruction programme received advice from an expert from the French Red Cross, who had provided expertise in Grenada following Hurricane Ivan. This meant that the lessons learnt in Grenada could directly benefit the Jamaican programme.

This is one of three case studies, originally presented and discussed at the Caribbean Regional Recovery Workshop held in Trinidad from 29 April to 1 May 2008. This document is accompanied by a video.