

**HOUSING AND COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION IN POST-DISASTER RECONSTRUCTION IN
CENTRAL AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN:
THE HUD TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, 2000-2001**

Summary

In the fall of 1998, Hurricane Georges battered both the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Five weeks later, Hurricane Mitch struck Central America, particularly Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, causing damage on a massive scale. The magnitude of the losses seriously set back development efforts in these countries.

In response, Congress, in May 1999, appropriated \$621 million to the US Agency for International Development (USAID) for the re-building of this region, an effort that would eventually involve the expertise of numerous federal agencies. In September 1999, HUD and USAID signed a Memorandum of Cooperation that allowed the transfer of \$10 million in funding to HUD along with USAID's legislative authority for technical assistance work in foreign countries. HUD's Office of International Affairs took responsibility for the design, development, and management of what was to become the largest international project ever undertaken by the Department. All of the \$10 million HUD obligated for reconstruction in Central America and the Caribbean was expended by January 31, 2002.

The main goal of HUD's program in the region was to use its expertise in housing and community redevelopment to help rebuild shattered communities and to assist these communities become better prepared, through planning, construction, and organization, to resist the destructive forces of future natural disasters. HUD's projects in community revitalization, land use and site planning, construction training, and housing finance have affected and will continue to affect the lives of thousands of people in this region. The project management experience and technical training materials developed by HUD are applicable to other poor communities throughout Latin America and the Caribbean and, potentially, in some areas of the US, such as the US-Mexico border region.

The Design of the HUD/International Program

The HUD-designed and -managed program was divided into four major themes:

- 1) community revitalization;
- 2) land use and site planning techniques;
- 3) housing construction training; and
- 4) housing finance.

The various projects were implemented by non-governmental organizations in five countries—Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic. The 15 projects were purposely designed as models for future adaptation in other countries across the region. In implementing its program, HUD brought new sources of American expertise in planning, building, and finance to accomplish its international technical assistance goals. All HUD's activities were closely coordinated with both the US Embassy and the USAID Mission in each country. The following examples highlight some of HUD's accomplishments by technical area in projects across the five countries.

Community revitalization projects

In its work with poor communities, HUD emphasized citizen participation, community organization and public-private partnerships. These principles were incorporated in work on the following projects:

El Salvador: In the poor communities of Maria Auxiliadora and Los Manantiales in San Salvador, the HUD program resulted in the development of comprehensive plans for each community, including site plans for the construction of 150 houses and the improvement of roads and walkways; risk assessment and soil mechanics studies; construction of a retaining wall to prevent land slides; new water piping to serve communal needs and new street lighting; and the repair of houses throughout both settlements.

Honduras: Many residents displaced by the flooding in Tegucigalpa, the capital city, relocated to the Amarateca Valley. In response, HUD formulated a comprehensive strategic plan, which included a land use plan to guide future development in the new community. In the San Pedro Sula area, the HUD comprehensive strategic plan emphasized disaster prevention measures, such as the construction of a new drainage system. When this system was tested in late 2001, it prevented flooding during a tropical storm. It was the first time that the village had not suffered from flooding during such a heavy rain. Other HUD program achievements included new school facilities and a community center.

Dominican Republic: The Nueva Isabela district in northern Santo Domingo has been the subject of comprehensive community plans, including risk maps highlighting areas of likely flooding and unstable soils, and emergency action plans, including evacuation strategies. The Guaricano project, where the HUD contractor worked closely with the residents as both project manager and community advisor, has become a model of how to completely rehabilitate the housing and living conditions of poor citizens in urban areas.

Land use and site planning

Through a HUD cooperative agreement, the American Planning Association (APA) has developed training materials on basic land use and site planning guidelines, with an emphasis on ways to lessen the destruction caused by natural forces—whether hurricanes, earthquakes, or landslides. APA has prepared a Spanish-language workbook, entitled *Los Fundamentos de Planificación de Sitios*, as the primary text for its technical training sessions for local officials and planners. Topics covered in this illustrated, large format reference work include: analysis of natural features (topography, soils and geology, climate, vegetation, bio-diversity); design concepts (site selection, layout, circulation, utilities and other infrastructure); plan development and management; and, a site plan review checklist. This workbook is used widely throughout the region for both training and research.

Apart from APA's work, HUD also contracted a soil engineering study to support USAID's development plans in the poor, densely populated districts of La Surza, Capotillo, and Simon Bolivar in the city of Santo Domingo. This risk-mapping exercise highlighted the more dangerous places in these riverbank communities in order to guide builders to safer areas.

Housing Construction Training

Using HUD funds, the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) Research Center has developed a number of training materials on safe construction techniques for use in its training sessions in the region. The basic manual is entitled *Reforzar y Conectar para Proteger*,

which emphasizes basic building methods to reinforce houses against the effects of both hurricanes and earthquakes.

NAHB has also produced a video showing the different stages of house construction, from foundation to roof, with examples drawn from houses at HUD project sites, such as in Guaricano. This video was shown on the national TV network in the Dominican Republic and on TV stations in Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador.

The NAHB training workshops, using both the video and the manual, were held in 2001 in three countries hardest hit by the hurricanes: Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Honduras. These workshops “trained the trainers” (about 3,000 people) in the fundamentals of safe construction methods, materials and practices. A companion poster series advertising good and safe construction principles will be distributed throughout the country, with U.S. Peace Corps Volunteers helping in the distribution.

Housing Finance

Through this program, HUD has provided over \$1.6 million to capitalize two new revolving micro-loan programs for both housing repair and micro-enterprises administered by small financial institutions in the Dominican Republic and in El Salvador. The average size of loans under this program is about \$1,600. HUD also gave a grant to each lending institution to train both lenders in best practices in loan administration and borrowers in debt management. In addition, HUD provided housing grants to numerous poor families in the Guaricano project in Santo Domingo to be used along with sweat equity toward the purchase of their homes.

As part of an effort to strengthen the housing finance system in the Dominican Republic, HUD developed basic mortgage origination, underwriting and servicing handbooks to guide bank lending activities and to help establish a mini-secondary mortgage facility. These handbooks, which are especially geared toward lower income households, can be adapted for use by mortgage lending institutions in many countries.