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TO THE FOLLOWING US-AID UNITS :

OFFICE OF FOREIGN DISASTER ASSISTANCE
FOOD FOR PEACE
LATIN AMERICA BUREAU
BARBADOS MISSION

REPORT ON ACTIVITIES RELATING TO HURRICANE DAVID -RELIEF -
DOMINICA NOVEMBER 9 TO DECEMBER 23, 1979.

SCOPE OF WORK

The scope of work as outlined in the contract was as follows :

1. Assist and advise the Government of Dominica in AID's effort to provide assistance to Dominica in the aftermath of the hurricane David disaster. The current and planned assistance includes the following areas :
 - Food Aid
 - Agriculture and Forestry
 - Housing
 - Health
 - Education
2. Assist and advise the Government of Dominica 's National Reconstruction Committee as requested in their efforts to identify and implement relief and reconstruction programs funded by both national and international resources.
3. Field additional requests for assistance and recommend courses of action to the Ambassador and AID Director in Barbados.
4. Keep the Ambassador and AID Director in Barbados fully informed regarding the status and progress of U.S. relief and rehabilitation assistance to Dominica.

SPECIFIC CONCERNS

During my briefings in Washington and Bridgetown, several items were high-lighted for my particular attention. They were :

1. The various Seabee projects and the phase-out of their activities with an orderly hand-over of material.
2. The location and eventual return of the water tanks and the field tents scattered across the island.
3. The functioning of the food program and the recommendation for changes if any were necessary.
4. Providing whatever assistance might be requested to facilitate the reconstruction program.
5. Following up on the shipments of seed potatoes, seed corn and back-pack sprayers which were shortly to be enroute.
6. Dealing with whatever else might be presented to me as AID's liaison on Dominica.
7. Reporting regularly to the Mission to insure that they were as informed as possible of developments pertaining to the various relief efforts in progress or envisaged.

SITUATION ON ARRIVAL

In an immediate post-disaster period one expects to encounter a number of problems and Dominica certainly was no exception. At the time of my arrival on the island, 10 telephones had been reconnected, all of them located in Roseau. This obviously resulted in much time spent trying to locate people and greatly hampered the efficient use of time. Fortunately, the telephone link overseas was quickly re-established so that I was able to communicate readily with the Mission in Barbados.

Nearly all the electricity was provided by stand-by generators, large and small, which had either been on hand or were imported following the hurricane. This meant either no electricity or fluctuating current accompanied by the noise and fumes of generators.

Fortunately the water system which had been badly damaged had been repaired by the Seabees early on so that what could have been a serious health problem had been averted.

Although there was a serious shortage of fresh fruits and vegetables, the quick shipments of foods from the United States and Europe averted widespread hunger and I saw no evidence of malnutrition anywhere on the island.

The vast majority of residential and commercial buildings had suffered serious damage and most of the island's warehouses were either totally destroyed or at least without a roof. For instance, the two major port warehouses were unroofed and the banana warehouse was completely destroyed as were several others near the port which could have been put to use in extremis. Fortunately, the Seabees were able to quickly erect a large Butler type building which served to shelter much of the relief supplies. The remaining supplies were left exposed to the elements or placed under tarpaulins when available.

The nature of Dominica lends itself to a leadership shortage. Many of the best trained people leave the island for higher paying posts on the bigger islands, North America or England. This is a serious problem in normal times but in a post-disaster situation constitutes something of a disaster in itself.

ACTIVITIES

Due to the extreme shortage of office space available coupled with the limited duration of my tour of duty, plus the fact that most of my activities were to be conducted out-of-doors, I chose not to compete for scarce office space and decided to work from my hotel room using several contact points in government headquarters where messages could be left for me.

The first matter requiring my attention was the Seabees who were beginning to wind up their activities. It is simply impossible to say too much regarding their contribution to the relief effort. I visited each of their projects in Roseau and spent an entire day travelling by jeep with Lt. Commander Hadbavney touring the entire northern two thirds of the island, inspecting the roads that they had opened. Great landslides had been cleared away, washouts had been filled, packed and re-surfaced and a common sight was parts of a large tree lying on both sides of the road with the blocking portion removed and lying alongside the road for later removal by local residents.

We were accompanied on this trip by two of the Seabees who had worked on these projects and we were frequently stopped by people who wanted to greet the boys and meet their commander. The appreciation and friendship were obviously sincere. I know that many of the Seabees found this a high point in their service. Several told me they would be first to volunteer if AID found itself in need of another detachment for similar duties. Others said that they were planning to re-enlist as a result of this experience. On the other side of the equation, the appreciation of the people of Dominica is probably best symbolized by the fact that all the Seabees who served there have been declared honorary citizens by the government of Dominica. I believe that the good will which these young men engendered will endure long after the visible scars of hurricane David have disappeared.

On the day the Seabees departed from Dominica, I signed for the cement, lumber and other materials which they were leaving and subsequently turned the material over to Bob Gersony for use in the reconstruction program.

The food and storage problems occupied the largest share of my time. I have reported on this matter in a separate memo to Messrs. Wheeler and Johnson who will be sharing it with you. I will not elaborate here on the subject except to say that my recommendation was for an early cessation of the dole feeding program, converting it as soon as possible either to a food-for-work program or a cash program to enable the government of Dominica to seriously address rural development. This would involve such projects as the construction of feeder roads, water systems, erosion control, reforestation etc.

Locating the water tanks and the tents was not easy. In fact, although I located all the tanks and reported their location and use to the AID mission, I never was able to locate all the tents. I did, however, ask Bob Gersony and Tony Jackson to keep them in mind as they travel around the island on their reconstruction activities and report to Dridgetown as to their location as they found them. I would suppose that due to the late arrival of the building materials from the United States and Europe, the tents will most likely be worn out by the time they are no longer needed.

A good deal of time was spent on the matters of the seed corn, seed potatoes and the back-pack sprayers. Although in terms of dollar value they would not be considered major items, they were very important to the agriculture of the island. I had arrived on Dominica on November 15th planning for their imminent arrival. This unfortunately was not to be the case.

The many problems concerning the purchase and shipment of seed corn from Trinidad were finally resolved and it was to arrive on December 22nd.

Somewhere in the system someone had stated that seed potatoes required cold storage shipping and no such ships were available to Dominica. I was told that the alternative, air freight, was too expensive and that the entire shipment was being cancelled. The fact that farmers had already prepared the ground for planting made this a serious matter. Doubting the necessity for cold storage shipment, I decided to check into the matter further and learned that this had never been the case in so far as Dominica was concerned and so informed the mission. They in turn were able to verify the accuracy of the information and eventually AID was able to ship the potatoes which I am told arrived on Christmas day. With January 5th the planting dead-line, this really allowed a very minimal time for clearing, transport, distribution and planting.

The sprayers were also an important item. Bananas have been one of Dominica's main exports. Prior to the hurricane the trees had been afflicted by a leaf spot disease resulting in a poor quality fruit.

The devastation by hurricane David resulted in a 90% snap-off and only a 10% up-rooting. As the snapped off trees began to grow back, regular and frequent spraying would keep the disease from recurring and should result in a bumper crop of bananas this coming season. To accomplish this, however, the sprayers were important. For some reason, the sprayers were only to arrive on December 22nd, the day after my departure. This was about one month late as there had been considerable plant growth by that time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In order to improve AID's response to future disasters in countries where there is no AID mission, I suggest the immediate assignment of one person to the disaster area to be solely responsible for the coordination of all AID activities related to the relief effort. This would, in my opinion, eliminate much of the confusion I observed on the part of the host government trying to decide to whom they should funnel their various requests for help.

2. I would like to emphasize the importance of having the Mission's officer-in-charge be a senior person with the authority to make the bureaucracy respond expeditiously and in this Dominica was fortunate. Problems raised directly with Dwight Johnson or through Martha Watkins invariably resulted in a quick decision and/or appropriate action.

3. There seems to be a need for AID to develop a system whereby certain key items, however small, are given priority status in a disaster situation and pushed through the system promptly. Such small items as the back-pack sprayers tend to be over-shadowed by much bigger shipments although they are absolutely vital to the success of one phase of the program. Failure to provide these items can negatively impact on the success of the total program.

At the end of this challenging assignment I wish to express my appreciation to the colleagues in OFDA and the Caribbean Office of the Latin America Bureau for having given me this opportunity. I wish further to express my appreciation to Bill Wheeler and the entire team in Bridgetown for their hospitality and for making me feel at home; my special thanks to Dwight Johnson for his constant support, and last and most especially to my trusty back-stop Martha Jane Watkins without whose unflagging efforts the entire Dominica venture would have been a good deal less effective.