



Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance

DISASTER CASE REPORT

Agency for
International
Development

Washington D.C.
20523

GUATEMALA - Floods

Date: September 1982 (FY 82)

Location: Pacific coast departments of Escuintal, Jutiapa, Santa Rosa, Jalapa

No. Dead: 620

No. Affected: 20,000 homeless

Damage: 2,350 houses destroyed or damaged; 36 bridges destroyed, 12 damaged; 30 major roads washed out; water systems of nine towns disrupted; major hydroelectric plant damaged; 36,000 acres of agricultural land submerged

The Disaster

A tropical depression (Hurricane Olivia) inundated the entire southern coastal area of Guatemala beginning on September 20. Combined with normally heavy seasonal rains, the storm resulted in extensive flooding throughout the region. Twenty rivers overflowed their banks, washing out roads, rail lines, and bridges.

On September 29, the country was rocked by two medium intensity earthquakes which, while not highly destructive themselves, contributed to the general state of emergency (30 houses were destroyed and 471 damaged). By October 6, the official toll of deaths attributable to the flooding reached 620, with 256 people seriously injured and 710 people still missing. Many of the injured were isolated in villages rendered inaccessible by the floods. The departments of Santa Rosa, Jutiapa, Jalapa, and Escuintal were most seriously affected; 315 people were killed in the town of Chiquimilla in Santa Rosa alone.

The flood waters carried away homes, created landslides that blocked roads, and backed up water systems servicing large populations. A total of 36 bridges were destroyed and at least 12 were badly damaged. Over 1,000 homes were completely destroyed and more than 1,300 required extensive repair. The railway line to Champerico was cut and the water supply system was rendered inoperable in nine villages. Damage to several hydroelectric plants, including the country's largest and newest facility at Aguacapas, resulted in power outages in Guatemala City.

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Action Taken by the Government of Guatemala (GOG)

On September 20, the GOG declared a state of emergency due to the tropical depression near the country's southern coast. The government convened the National Emergency Committee (CONE) which immediately undertook coordination of the relief and evacuation effort. The committee directed the activities of the Army, the Red Cross, the volunteer fire departments, and other national voluntary agencies, and provided liaison with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and the United Nations Office of the Disaster Relief Coordinator.

The Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare established a coordinating committee to address the health needs of the affected areas, and the Ministry of Economy announced that laws prohibiting hoarding or speculating in scarce commodities and spreading false information would be enforced; transgressors would be severely punished.

CONE acted immediately to provide food, shelter, and medical attention to the disaster victims, and simultaneously undertook a nationwide survey to assess damages and identify needs of victims. It also established two bases for relief efforts at Puerto San Juan and in Jutiapa. From these points, the GOG Air Force distributed food, medicines, blankets, and clothing to stranded populations via helicopter. The injured were airlifted to medical facilities. Potable water was trucked into towns whose systems were inoperable. The Highway Department cleared and repaired major coastal roads and the highway between Guatemala City and the stricken area to enable relief workers and supplies to reach isolated communities.

CONE also held regular meetings with the international donor community communicating the latest damage reports and requesting specific relief items and funds. Particularly needed were cash contributions to fund helicopter flights to evacuate the sick and injured and bring in food, clothing, and supplies. Additional needs included assistance in repairing village water systems in Jutiapa and Santa Rosa departments and funds for the local purchase of housing repair and reconstruction materials.

By October 26, the emergency phase of the relief effort was concluded and CONE relinquished its coordinating function to the National Reconstruction Committee.

Assistance Provided by the United States Government (USG)

Following the GOG declaration of a national emergency on September 21, U.S. Ambassador Frederic Chapin determined that the Guatemalan flooding was of a magnitude to warrant USG assistance. Exercising his disaster assistance authority, Ambassador Chapin made available \$25,000 to transport emergency relief supplies in the Achiguate, Coyolate, Marganitas, Maria, Linda, and Madre Vieja river basins.....\$25,000

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As details became available on the extent of damage, Ambassador Chapin recommended that USG assistance be increased. Fifty-thousand dollars were contributed to CONE to cover local rental of helicopters and other transport to deliver food and clothing.....\$50,000

A contribution of \$84,000 was made to purchase construction materials (corrugated sheeting, nails, wood) to build 300 houses (the National Reconstruction Committee estimated that \$28,000 was needed to construct 100 houses).....\$84,000

Supplies, principally PCV pipe, for use in repairing the damaged water systems, were purchased locally.....\$30,000

As access to isolated communities revealed even greater damage, the USG made a further donation of \$100,000 to assist in the transport of food and other relief goods and to provide materials for housing repair and reconstruction.....\$100,000

TOTAL \$289,000

Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies*

Catholic Relief Services - made a cash grant of \$50,000 for the local purchase of medicines and building materials.

World Vision International - made a \$15,000 cash contribution for a relief project that supplied food, tools, utensils, and medicines to 400 families in the villages of Araisapo and Santa Maria Xalapan.

\$65,000

Assistance Provided by the International Community*

International Organizations

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) - donated 11.5 million pounds of food valued at \$180,000.

Organization of American States (OAS) - contributed \$267,318 to the National Reconstruction Committee.

U.N. Development Program - made a cash grant of \$30,000 for the local purchase of roofing materials and tools.

U.N. Children's Education Fund (UNICEF) - contributed \$40,000 in cash for the provision of roofing materials and to repair damaged water systems.

U.N. Office of the Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO) - issued an international appeal on September 24 and received \$1,064,329 in response.

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Assistance Provided by Governments

Canada - pledged \$25,000 to the National Reconstruction Committee.

China - contributed \$36,000 in cash.

Germany, Federal Republic of - donated food rations valued at \$47,940 and made a cash grant of \$4,060.

France - made a cash grant of \$14,492.

Japan - made a cash grant of \$50,000.

Malta - made a cash grant of \$3,000.

Switzerland - contributed \$18,650 in cash through UNDRO to UNDP for local purchase of corrugated sheets for roofing.

TOTAL \$1,828,729

* Please note: the listings of assistance provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies and the International Community are compiled from reports submitted voluntarily to OFDA. It is not always possible to verify the accuracy of these reports, nor the dollar value of in-kind contributions. As a result, the total dollar values indicated in these sections should be taken as representative figures.