



DISASTER
RELIEF

CASE REPORT
Trinidad and Tobago-Tropical Storm
August 1974

Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Tropical Storm—August 1974

Tropical Storm Alma hit the island of Trinidad on August 14, 1974 and left in its wake an estimated \$5 million in property damage, an even greater amount of crop losses, and in central Trinidad hundreds of people homeless and in need of food and clothing. Although only two lives were lost due to the storm, damage to buildings and agricultural land was extensive, and thus after the immediate needs for food, clothing and shelter were met, there was much rehabilitation work to be done in housing, forestry, public works, and agriculture.

Foreign Disaster Case Reports are publications of the Office of the Foreign Disaster Relief Coordinator, Agency for International Development. This office has responsibility for coordinating U.S. Government foreign disaster relief responses and for the further coordination of such activities with those of the U.S. private and international disaster relief communities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Coordinator acknowledges assistance received in the preparation of this and other case reports from the many public and private organizations in the United States and abroad engaged in foreign disaster relief.

Value of U.S. Government Assistance\$5,000

About 6:00 A.M. on Wednesday, August 14, 1974 Tropical Storm Alma hit the east coast of Trinidad, near Manzanilla Point. For the next three hours most of the island was subjected to rain and high winds, with wind speeds registered at 55 mph and frequent greater gusts. The storm moved almost due west across the island, wreaking most of its damage in the rich sugar lands of central Trinidad. Fortunately much of the sugar crop had recently been planted and was too young to sustain much damage. Trinidad's meteorological service tracked the storm from the time of its formation several hundred miles east of Trinidad through constant monitoring by the U.S. weather satellites. A hurricane alert was officially called late Monday afternoon, August 12. Frequent announcements on the status of the storm were made during the day of August 13 by National Emergency Relief Organization (NERO). All residents were warned to take precautions, but most attention was focused on the nearby island of Tobago where Hurricane Flora had caused severe damage in 1963. Not until the early hours of August 14 was it apparent that the storm had veered toward Trinidad and away from Tobago.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago (GOTT) estimated property damage at \$5 million. Some 3,000 buildings and 17,750 acres of cropland were severely damaged. From a human standpoint, 50,000 people were affected, two were killed, and unknown numbers injured. Five hundred families were left homeless and 1,000 families required mass feeding.

ACTION TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS:

The National Emergency Relief Organization of Trinidad and Tobago is a small agency which was established within the Ministry of National Security as a result of the 1963 Hurricane Flora disaster to act as coordinator of all disaster relief. Although previously untested by a significant natural disaster in Trinidad or Tobago, NERO performed very creditably and served as a catalyst around which large-scale relief efforts were carried out.

Soon after Tropical Storm Alma struck Trinidad, the GOTT made an initial assessment of damage and the Cabinet authorized \$50,000 for emergency relief. With these funds, augmented by contributions from private agencies and individual citizens, emergency distribution of food parcels, blankets, and items of clothing was made throughout the country. About 40 percent of this initial allocation went to emergency expenditures for building materials for hard-hit home owners. After considering detailed assessments of damage caused by the storm, the Cabinet on August 31 approved an appropriation of \$4.7 million for rehabilitation work in housing, forestry, public works, and agriculture.

No estimate is available as to the amount of relief funds provided from private sources, but considerable quantities of donated food, clothing, and building materials were distributed by private agencies.

The greatest damage done by Tropical Storm Alma occurred in the agricultural sector, from which the GOTT received 3,458 requests for assistance in agriculture. As of September 27, the Ministry of Agriculture had spent \$150,000 for initial rehabilitation, plus \$50,000 for the clearing of damaged agricultural access roads. Extensive damage was done to several forestry plantations, and relief work was deemed to be urgent to take advantage of the existing suitable planting weather. An estimated \$50,000 was spent for this purpose by October 4, and all replanting was expected to be finished by the end of the year. A number of public buildings, especially schools and hospitals, and highways were damaged by the storm. The Ministry of Works estimated that \$45,000 would be spent to repair highways and an undetermined sum on public buildings, although rehabilitation of the latter was delayed by the non-availability of certain types of building materials.

In addition to NERO and other government agencies, many private organizations provided assistance to the disaster victims. The most prominent of these was the Red Cross Society of Trinidad and Tobago, which helped organize the distribution of food, clothing, blankets, and other materials in the stricken areas. The Inter-Religious Organization, the Businessmen's Association, and the Sugar Industry Labor Welfare Committee were among the other groups which provided significant amounts of assistance.

The only organization spontaneously created as a result of the disaster was the Central Alma Emergency Relief Committee, based in the most seriously affected area, and comprised of representatives of the Central Trinidad Lions, the Central Chamber of Commerce, the Central Jaycees, Child Welfare Leagues, the COUVA Improvement Committee, and other organizations. This group appears to have disbanded as soon as the central government took over the burden of the major rehabilitation effort.



The tropical storm caused extensive damage in the agriculture sector of Trinidad.

**ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE
U.S. GOVERNMENT:**

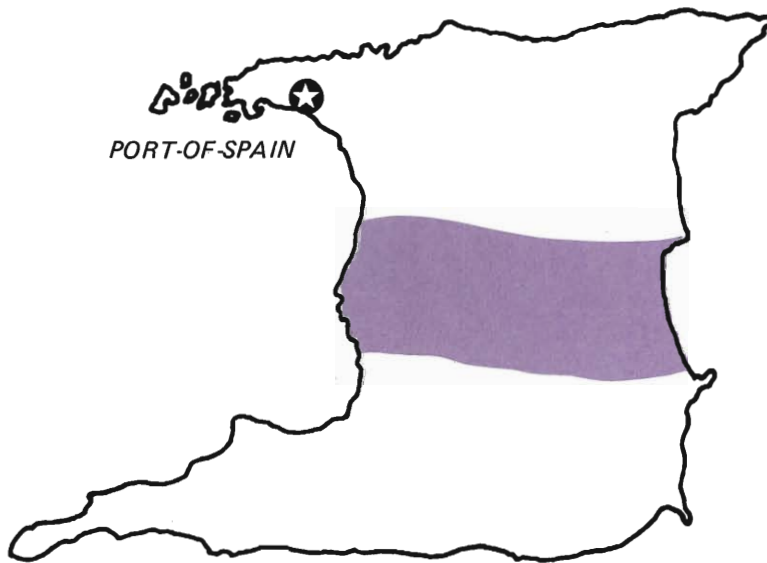
In the first few days following the storm, initial reports based largely on what happened in the capital city of Port of Spain described only wind damage and stressed that the storm was much less severe than Hurricane Flora. By the weekend of August 17-18, however, detailed reports from residents in Central Trinidad made clear the magnitude of the situation, describing hundreds of damaged homes and other buildings, many of them roofless, families still in need of food and clothing, and thousands of acres of cropland damaged. After consulting with the GOTT authorities, Ambassador Lloyd I. Miller determined that a disaster had occurred which warranted USG assistance, and a formal notification was sent to Washington August 26, 1974. Further discussions with GOTT officials, NERO officers, and directors of the Red Cross Society convinced the Embassy that the most immediately useful assistance would be a cash donation. The Ambassador presented, on September 6, 1974, a cash donation of TT\$10,000 (about US\$5,000) to the Red Cross Society of Trinidad and Tobago. This money, together with other donations and funds already on hand, was used to conduct a wide range of relief activities including provision and distribution of foodstuffs, clothing, blankets, temporary shelter, and other building materials. No detailed report of the Red Cross Society's activities was prepared, but the Society reported that a total of US\$12,393 was disbursed from its disaster relief fund.

**ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:**

On an unofficial basis the Canadian Women's Club collaborated with the Red Cross Society in gathering and preparing clothes for distribution. The Amoco Trinidad Oil Company, a subsidiary of Standard Oil of Indiana, made a cash donation of TT\$1,000 (about US\$500) to the Trinidad and Tobago Red Cross Society.



TOBAGO



TRINIDAD