

**Central America.  
Hurricane Mitch  
Global Plans 1998 and 1999.  
Synthesis report-2.000**

**January 17th through February 20th, 2001.**

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## I EVALUATION SUMMARY.

### SUBJECT OF THE EVALUATION:

**Country of Operation (or region):** Central America. El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.

**Name of Partners:** Terre des Hommes-I, ACSUR Las Segovias, SI, MOVIMONDO, CARE Int., German AGRO ACTION, Nuova Fronteira, CISP, GOAL, ATLAS Logistique, PTM, MDME, MPDL, GVC, CRE, CRG, MSF, Danchurch Aid, OXFAM-UK, AMI-P, Caritas-E, MDMG, GTZ, ACF-F, CINS, ANNF, Intersos-I, CRAus, TROCAIRE, ASB, Malteser, Enfants Refugiés du Monde, COOPI, OIKOS, Atlas, CISS, Handicap International, PNUD, ACH-E, Médecin International, ADRA, Caritas-Neederlans, CRF, CESVI, HELP, IFRC, and CRIC.

### Operation contracts n°:

First Decision - ECHO7TPS721071998712000

Second Decision - ECHO/TPS/210/1998/15000

Global Plan - ECHO/TPS/210/1999/06000

Fourth Decision\* - ECHO/NIC/HND/210/01000

### Dates of the operation:

First Decision - November 4th, 1998

Second Decision - December 21st, 1998

Global Plan - September 23rd, 1999

Fourth Decision\* - August 11th, 2000

### Amount:

First Decision - 6,8 MEURO

Second Decision - 9,5 MEURO

Global Plan - 16 MEURO

Fourth Decision\* - 3,34 MEURO

### Sectors concerned and description:

First Decision - Emergency relief (shelter, basic health care and drugs, basic water and sanitation, food relief).

Second Decision - Health, basic housing, water and sanitation.

Global Plan - Water and sanitation system rehabilitation, more permanent housing, health.

Fourth Decision\* - Water and sanitation system rehabilitation, health.

\*Honduras and Nicaragua only.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE EVALUATION:

**Dates for the evaluation:** From 04/12/2000 to 30/04/2001 (extension included)

**Report n°: 303**

**Name of consultant:** Juan Luis Domínguez González.

### Purpose and methodology:

This evaluation was completed in response to a request by the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO), to assess to what degree humanitarian operations approved after the hurricane Mitch, brought about significant relief to the target population and also contributed, among other things, to strengthen coping capacities to that same population. This report provides the findings on the emergency aid ECHO committed to the four Central American countries (Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala). Project sites of 37 operations were visited in order to assess the impact reached.

The evaluation analysed operations focusing mainly on Water and Sanitation provision, temporal shelter and housing, and Health systems. A two-pronged approach was used in order to assess ECHO's performance. One looked at the decision-making process, supervisory visits, follow-up, and control and evaluation sessions carried out by both ECHO HQ's and experts in the field. The other converged on the performance of the ECHO partner INGO's.

This evaluation concentrated mainly on the 1999 Global Plan document. However, the team as a whole tried to sustain some general findings and conclusions which might also apply to those first and second decisions, always with the respect due to those main players who remained absent by the time the evaluation was performed.

The first ECHO response took place on November 4th 1998, amounted to 6.8 MEURO, and was channelled among 17 INGO's through 17 operations. It funded immediate emergency relief interventions on shelter, food, basic health care and basic water and sanitation. The second decision was issued on December 21st 1998 and amounted to 9.5 MEURO. This time 29 INGO's were funded through 29 operations (5 were reconverted) based on temporary housing, water and sanitation, and health care. The Global Plan committed 16 MEURO which were disbursed among 39 INGO's through 50 operations, aimed at more permanent housing and water and sanitation systems, strengthening of health care services and epidemiological surveillance systems.

## MAIN CONCLUSIONS:

### IMPACT

A great majority of projects implemented had a significant impact in the reduction of human suffering. Field interviews attested to the very positive impact in terms of the installation of water and sanitation systems, better health care services provided, better prevention of, and fight against most prevalent diseases, new shelters and land titles, although in most cases resettlements were situated on marginalised land, which implied that, in many cases, subsistence farming was ruled out. Projects where stakeholders could stay relatively close to their original environment had better prospects of successful future.

It seems that the discussion laid not only in whether or not ECHO interventions had a sufficient impact, but also on measures taken to assess the degree of this impact and on whether this impact had durable effects in the target populations.

a) Many of the beneficiaries interviewed didn't feel that they had grown *dependent on the external aid* provided, as most interventions focused more in helping them to develop their coping capacities by means of training, workshops, etc.

b) Effects on *local economy and population incomes*: a large amount of the beneficiaries clearly expressed their satisfaction with the way the projects had improved their purchasing power, if only to free them from being forced to allocate an important part of their meagre income on medicines, as water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases had been chased away in many communities to a great extent, because of a better water supply and excreta disposal, and by their improved knowledge on how to fight infections.

The survival strategies of families often meant sending one of more family members away to look for work elsewhere. In some cases people decided to go elsewhere permanently and dismantled their new houses and sold the valuable parts (corrugated galvanised iron roof sheeting). Another important aspect related to maintaining a house is the need to save money or other valuables in order to be able to pay for minimal maintenance expenses. For all projects visited this aspect, not only for the house but also for the water system or health service, implied big social problems: People are not used to think in this way, there is a gender barrier between the needs and priorities of a man as head of the household and the needs perceived by the woman, and there is a general lack of everything which makes saving a very difficult matter.

c) Effects on the *preparation, mitigation and prevention of catastrophes*: Most interventions included a disaster preparedness component. Those which didn't, put the blame on the "*short operational timeframe*", as partners could not allocate sufficient time for the training in preparation and mitigation and prevention, for the actions to be of any impact.

d) Effects on *health and nutritional practices*: Almost all projects with few exceptions, health and non health-related, had an integral component of health education.

e) *Environmental effects*: The degradation of the environment was particularly evident in the watersheds of the recharge areas for the aquifers supplying water to the potable water systems. This, at a further stage, reduced the filtration of the heavy rains to the subsoil and, together with the widespread destruction of natural vegetation, led to increased runoff, which caused erosion of the fragile hills.

Despite the imperative need for an improvement in the environmental management of watersheds, the "Strategic Guidelines for ECHO's action on Central America following Hurricane Mitch" makes no more than a passing mention reference to the theme of improved environmental management. Those strategic guidelines make no mention either of the need for capacity building.

f) Effects on *capacity building*: There is a significant variation in the skills vested in the community (e.g. water committees) between different partners. Individual INGO's have all highlighted the need to provide adequate training.

An overwhelming majority of all stakeholders interviewed, INGO's representatives, INGO's national partners, communities of beneficiaries, EU Members States, local authorities, national government officers..., described ECHO as the humanitarian agency swiftest in response, most flexible in adaptation, promptitude in fund allocation, and effectiveness in delivering emergency aid in the immediate post-Mitch emergency humanitarian intervention. Overall, almost all opinions agreed on the substantial impact ECHO decisions had made.

### RELEVANCE

a) Most INGOs conducted their *needs appraisal*, their *choice of beneficiaries*, and the *objectives targeted*, in close co-operation with the local authorities. Thus, their relevance as such should be contested with the assessed relevance given to local authorities' priorities. Some information collected from beneficiaries suggested that this wasn't always the case.

A *census of beneficiaries* was included in the strategy of the majority of the interventions, albeit at very different degrees of complexity which were not reflected here. A good amount of interventions also incorporated a *community diagnosis appraisal*.

b) *Coverage* of an area seemed to be and will remain to be a serious problem by lack of information about the needs beyond the direct boundaries of the co-ordinating municipalities. It appeared that rural areas which were especially difficult to access and where potential victims lived isolated, will always lack data.

c) The *response time* of ECHO seemed satisfactory.

d) The *deployed strategy in relation to identified needs*. A great share of INGO's implemented their activities, not only through the governmental already existing network, but also reinforced it, thus contributing to make their methodological design more consistent and technical.

### CO-ORDINATION and COHERENCE

a) *Co-ordination with other humanitarian operators*: in co-ordinating complementary actions of INGOs it appeared often difficult to achieve it in an appropriate manner. For instance, houses were sometimes ready while the first latrine had yet to be constructed. Duplication of activities in the same area by different INGOs with or without ECHO funding was not found.

It seemed that ECHO partner INGO's were not too eager to co-ordinate actions, if that means something more than simply trying to avoid overlapping. However, encouraging signs were detected in some areas, for instance in the *Valle de Polochic*, Guatemala.

b) *Co-ordination to local authorities*: All projects showed a certain level of co-operation with the local authorities. Some INGO's made an excellent job in committing local authorities to the operations performed.

c) *Participation of beneficiaries*: On the whole, many interventions included the beneficiaries in one or more stages of their operations. In most cases, these beneficiaries had a relevant characteristic which made them apt for being incorporated to the intervention (eg. community health workers, malaria control volunteers, bricklayers, etc.) but, in general, it seemed that the beneficiaries acted more of as passive recipients of aid than someone actively involved in the project's relevant implementation stages (study of alternatives, decision making process, budgetting control and follow-up...).

The design of many drinking water systems was the result of work of the partner INGO's technical team, without effective participation from the village. Even in the villages visited where the community participated in the design, the participation did not include selection of alternative service levels with different associated contributions. It seemed that the duration of ECHO projects did not permit adequate efforts to be dedicated to effective community participation during design and construction. Sufficient time should be allocated to project implementation to effectively develop the necessary community support mechanisms that will permit the achievements obtained to become durable investments.

It was observed the best accessible regions had the highest concentration of different INGO's projects, and had a rather passive response from the beneficiaries. On the other hand, remote areas difficult to access from outside, community participation was high.

No specific details about participation of beneficiaries were found in ECHO "*fiches de suivi d'operation*", in spite of being clearly stated in the CCP/FPC second provision, which says: "*involve beneficiaries of the operation in the management of relief aid*", and also being given an outstanding position in the Global Plan's methodological approach: "*the beneficiaries, especially women, should actively participate in the design and in the implementation process...*".

### **EFFECTIVENESS**

Housing and shelter is one of the components that has the potential to diminish the vulnerability of the target population. Two factors were identified as important: The first one is access to work and/or arable land, second one is availability and durability of other related services like water and sanitation, firewood for cooking and to a lesser extent primary health care services, light for social security, education and community building. In case the targeted population lacks one or more of the above mentioned components it is possible that the general health conditions, including social disintegration and therewith its vulnerability, increases despite the fact that good housing has been provided.

The 1999 Global Plan specified "objectives/type of aid" for individual partners. However the content of the "objectives/type of aid" could at best be considered as "results" or simply "activities". The global plan did have a "methodological approach" but failed to encourage partners to assume stated objectives in their submissions. ECHO was not providing sufficient orientation to partners in various aspects, such as:

1. ECHO did not establish clear objectives and results which were easily measurable and could be followed by the INGO's.
2. The standards, both in technical and the social areas, required for many activities to be carried out, especially the construction of water and sanitation systems, were not delineated to partners.

The effect of this variation in technical standards and techniques employed in the social area was a large variation in the satisfaction of needs. Even though assuming the MOH in charge could appoint staff in a permanent way to accomplish the targets set up by the operation, and perhaps to increase the budget allocated to that specific program, how could they provide for the amount of transport an INGO could incorporate in the operation for the control and surveillance of, say, a dengue or malaria outbreak?

Under ECHO regulations, local transport is subcontracted, as ECHO doesn't allow for purchase of vehicles, and paid by with ECHO resources.

**COST-EFFECTIVENESS** (as established on the basis of the quantitative elements identified under the previous issue).

Cost-effectiveness in relation to the rehabilitation sector can be defined as to which costs of a minimal shelter per beneficiary can be built, and regional differences and demands should be taken into account. In principle it should be possible to make a cost-comparison between different projects using different housing concepts. For some projects, number of beneficiaries were well estimated and a ratio between money spent per beneficiary could be calculated and compared with other projects. But sometimes it was not clear if houses were only repaired or that completely new houses were built. On the other hand, in other projects the construction costs of a house were by the fact that the project may have been partly financed by ECHO and partly by other donors. This fact made a comparison purely on basis of ECHO expenditures a real challenge.

Technically addressing cost-effectiveness of an intervention on health such as ECHO is usually funding is rather difficult, and can only be meaningfully carried out for specific, highly defined, components of a relief programme, and even then, great care is needed to distinguish between outcome indicators (i.e., malnutrition) and process indicators (patients seen). Furthermore, when the projects considered to be highly cost-effective, according to this criteria, were cross-checked with those having scored high in effectiveness (i.e. achievement of the specific objective, outreach of the aid delivered, and side-benefits attained), no direct relationship between them could be found.

### **EFFICIENCY**

a) *Quality of planning and mobilisation of aid:* During the evaluation it was clear that the use of INGO's as the implementing entities for the ECHO programmes was an efficient method of mobilising aid quickly at a minimum cost. Most INGO's were solid and experienced organisations, with long track record in Central America and had a proven and effective strategy in place.

The selection of recipients responded to the description contained in the Global Plan for the partners visited during this evaluation. In general it was possible to note an increase in the number of beneficiaries from that originally proposed.

b) *The timing of interventions:* considering that nearly 90% of the INGO's requested ECHO to amend the length of the operation, around half the interventions showed no convincing reasons to request an extension (raining season, delays caused by the institutional counterpart, lack of commitment by the population of beneficiaries, etc.).

c) *Financial management:* changes in the budget allocation were not always considered consistent with sound financial backup, although ECHO accepted them all. However, and as far as the evaluators were able to ascertain, the European representatives of the INGO's did not cause any delays in disbursement of resources.

d) *Logistics management*: Logistics were apparently well planned and designed, and effectively contributed to the achievements. Almost all partner INGO's showed expertise in handling logistic requirements.

However, some of the INGO's were also subject to limitations, such as those in the technical field. On the other hand, INGO's have shown themselves to be agile implementation agencies – which is an important factor when responding to a disaster. In conclusion, it is felt that the rapid response to meet specific objectives, in response to an emergency, could only be achieved through the work with INGO's.

e) *Monitoring mechanisms*: Very few INGO's had impressive monitoring and measurement mechanisms in place. Most interventions omitted to include indicators in both their proposal or reporting documents. To what extent this is due to the limited design of the Global Plan falling short of setting up appropriate guidelines to outline the internal administrative and organisational controls that the partners should implement, or to the weaknesses belonging to the poor management tools of most partner INGO's, is a matter of debate.

ECHO has recently deployed new proposal and reporting formats, substantially improving the old ones, which were considered by the majority of INGO's to be too basic a tool for consistent presentation and reporting. The old format was clearly less demanding in the amount and the quality of information requested on both proposals and reports. This particularity notwithstanding, about half of all operations evaluated submitted documents showing a surprising lack of method: no editing dates were added to the papers, and sometimes it took pains to ascertain when a specific document was written.

Turning to the "*Fiche de suivi d'operations*", absolutely no assessment completed by ECHO on the projects' implementation, made any mention whatsoever to the lack of performance indicators found in the great majority of the operations evaluated.

### **PERSPECTIVES and VIABILITY**

1. *The interventions' perspective*: Although no one would question the lack of viability of an immediate emergency reaction, as was the case with the first and second decisions, with a duration ranking from 3 to 6 months, the Global Plan was a meditated, strategic, and structured delivery of aid. It took nearly 5 months from the moment the INGO's submitted their proposals to ECHO, to the start-up phase. All operations were confined, in strict observation of the CCP/FPC, within 6 months, "*except in very special circumstances...*".
2. The *Global Plan* was, therefore, almost unanimously considered as a *rehabilitation programme*, and no rehabilitation programme can endure the boundaries of a 6-month length -almost systematic approval of two-month extensions notwithstanding-, and pretend reaching a basic degree of viability.
3. The *strategies involved*: A short-term operation, up to a 6-month duration, has a strategy to last for exactly that time. Sequential short-term projects financed by ECHO have therefore an independent operational framework and cannot be included in a strategy of a longer-term approach.

a) When the above is agreed upon, viability was, the evaluators believe, one of the most striking shortcomings within the Global Plan. Around 90% of all persons interviewed coincided that most programmes financed by ECHO would collapse shortly after the INGO would stop its support.

b) Very few persons interviewed could clearly answer to the question of whether ECHO funded operations were exclusively humanitarian emergency, or rehabilitation, or a mixture of both.

c) The importance of building links with development agencies is clearly understood by the partner INGO's, but the incorporation of rehabilitation and development issues in the Global Plan was rather limited. The ECHO 1999 Global Plan, chapter No. 3 quotes "...*ECHO is strengthening its co-ordination with other EC services present in Central America (DGRelex and DGDEV) in order to assure a greater complementarity of programmes in the aftermath of Mitch*".

The evaluators could not find any actions that were adopted by ECHO in order to approximate INGO's funded with other services of the E.C. It seemed to rely entirely on INGO's responsibility to search that contact and win E.C. services -mainly DGDEV and co-financing line B7/6.000.

### **VISIBILITY.**

During the evaluation and associated discussions with community members it became evident that visibility should not be limited to T-shirts, signs and caps. The more fundamental issue of who is ECHO, how does the support get to the communities and what are the objectives of ECHO remain on the sidelines. The answer might be to change the emphasis from a passive approach to visibility to actively promoting an understanding of the programme, the strategy, objectives, sources of finance and origin of the finance. A good proportion of partner INGO's felt that the visibility implemented, as it was conceived so far, was futile, besides being disappointing, and didn't reflect the actual impact of ECHO interventions.

Moreover, there seemed to be a lack of information regarding ECHO activities as perceived by the respective governmental institutions. ECHO's very low profile regarding national authorities seemed to affect the notion they had about ECHO-funded actions. Almost all INGO's approached declared they would welcome a clear-cut attitude of ECHO concerning visibility: to establish clear guidelines, designed in co-ordination with the partner INGO's, in order to accomplish a visibility valid for both.

### **HORIZONTAL ISSUES: GENDER, LRRD, SECURITY...**

#### **a) Gender**

The issue of gender was not given sufficient emphasis. Partners tended to gloss over the important issues associated with the role of women in a durable project. The role of both women and men in the ECHO initiatives requires deeper analysis than that which can be afforded in this short evaluation. Nevertheless it was evident that the responsibilities of both sexes were not fairly distributed. The most striking discriminatory point was the generally accepted role of women in the home right from the cook through to the member of the family responsible for collecting the water. In the field visits and analysis of the work of each partner, only superficial initiatives were evident in the field of gender. In the rehabilitation projects, however, it has been observed that these roles did have significant effects on husband-wife relationships. Among the most vulnerable were women without an official husband and with young children.

In general women valued a solid house more than the men. This was due to that the men were agriculturists or were landless labourers or thriving on trade in the informal or formal sector. In the former case they would prefer to have received a piece of arable land rather than a house. People who never had been living in some sort of close community and who were forced to live in a settlement usually had all kinds of social adaptation problems. A social awareness program for women in one of the rehabilitation projects showed that domestic violence turned out to be a major problem for many women in this community. It would be interesting to investigate to which extent domestic violence is related to rehabilitation of people.

#### **b) LRRD**

For a "continuum" to be successful, three principles need to be followed:

1. A hierarchical and time-bound sequence between emergency, rehabilitation and development.
2. A continuous focus on the same beneficiaries.
3. A concept of "integral approach".

As stated in the provision II of the revised CCP/FPC, "*Establish the linkage between relief, rehabilitation and development with a view to helping the population regain a minimum level of self-sufficiency...*". The ECHO 1999 Global Plan document reads: "*Most of the selected projects include an element with a long-term perspective...*". Nowhere was this inclusion to be found in any of the proposals reviewed.

The Global Plan focused on PRRAC<sup>1</sup> as the natural link between ECHO actions and a longer-term approach. Although ECHO had already included PRRAC into its "*Fiches de suivi d'operations*" as a desirable link, there was only one single mention to ECHO found in a November 1999 600-page PRRAC document<sup>2</sup>. According to the PRRAC established strategies, INGO's have only access to a small component -"Local Initiatives Fund"-, which considerably limits their participation.

A key factor in better linking emergency to development actions was to construct a house in a place where people would be able to regain an economical and ecological sustainable way of living.

### **ECHO DISASTER PREPAREDNESS: DIPECHO**

It is relevant to point out the overwhelming lack of knowledge about DIPECHO's activities many key informants expressed such as E.U. Members States, some INGO's under the Global Plan, local and national authorities not directly involved in disaster preparedness, etc. Under its Second Action Plan DIPECHO allocated 3.500.000 E to 10 organisations, 7 of which were already involved in ECHO 1999 Global Plan.

Two positive examples were observed: in one rehabilitation project significant effort was made to counteract the on-going erosion processes. Tree-planting and reforestation had been carried out and had built awareness among the beneficiaries to protect their environment. Another initiative as follow-up after finalisation of a resettlement project was the set-up of a communication network with short-wave radios between remote communities and the municipality. Both projects were financed by DIPECHO.

ECHO should have as a compulsory requirement the introduction of a component of disaster preparedness and risk awareness in every proposal presented after a natural disaster decision, and this could well be de-

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<sup>1</sup> PRRAC: "*Programa Regional de Reconstrucción de América Central*" (Regional Reconstruction Plan for Central America).

<sup>2</sup> "*Diagnóstico final de necesidades*" ACR/B7-3130/1B/1999/0302. November 1999.



veloped by DIPECHO. Many INGO's expressed their complete ignorance on what DIPECHO was up to in Central America.

DIPECHO should make an effort to be known regionwide. It was unequivocally believed by many that the answer to ECHO's phasing out in a future should imply DIPECHO's weightier presence in Central America. And DIPECHO should therefore become the logical counterpart to those humanitarian organisations focused on both emergency and rehabilitation issues. Although reviewing DIPECHO performance is out of the scope of this evaluation, some conclusions and recommendations on it will be added to the chapters below.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS.**

### **IMPACT.**

1. ECHO experts could sit down with its partner NGO's in the field, both European and local, and set up a comprehensive and agreed upon list of performance indicators to be of common use in those operations with specifically shared patterns, although it is recognized that the development of objectives and indicators for emergency projects is not an easy task given the short notice that is generally available to design the initiative. Nevertheless, from the previous point it is clear that indicators and objectives should form an integral part of an ECHO emergency proposal.
2. There is a significant variation in the skills vested in the community water committees between different partners. Individual INGO's have all highlighted the need to provide adequate training for the water committees. The period of time allocated to the implementation of the ECHO projects, does not allow sufficient effort to be dedicated to the training of stakeholders. As indicated in the section on local capacity building, partners may not allocate sufficient time for the training of stakeholders in all the areas required. Training in preparation, mitigation and prevention of disasters is no exception. It is felt that an ECHO supported component of environmental management is needed, linked to the water and sanitation programme, in environmentally fragile areas such as Central America. This should be especially directed at the river basins that form recharge areas for the aquifers and watersheds that supply the water for the drinking water systems.
3. The concept of disaster preparedness should be emphasised among partners to such an extent that it should become a routine component of any ECHO (or for that matter NGO) intervention in the region. Activities for disaster awareness, preparation and mitigation could also be discussed with partner INGO's, so they could incorporate this component no matter the time span allowed for the operation. Environmental management should also be encouraged as one of the most effective disaster prevention measures for Central America.

### **RELEVANCE.**

4. The issue of what partnership actually means for both ECHO and its partner INGO's should be addressed without further delay. It seems that what is in discussion is not so much whether or not ECHO partners are more or less competent, which according to these findings they generally are. It rather is whether or not ECHO can take the leading role in humanitarian emergency response and share its goals with its partner organisations.
5. ECHO could make an extra effort in redefining the number International Non Governmental Organisations signing the CCP/FPC, with criteria agreed upon in advance with them, and then carefully screening which ones are actually capable to carry out the kind of humanitarian actions ECHO wants to share with them.
6. In immediate post-emergency situations, ECHO is not in a position to accurately quantify the levels of assistance needed. Nevertheless, the partner INGO's, particularly those which already have a presence in the disaster area, are among the best informed entities in the disaster affected region. It is to be assumed that the partners are able to quantify expected results in terms that go beyond the simple monetary expenditure. The intervention of ECHO was a clear response to the perceived needs of the affected population.
7. In the assessment of the needs of beneficiaries, "lack of shelter" is very obvious. However, it is recommended to evaluate the value of shelter provision against other needs. Of these other needs the most important is that of food security or work. Provision of and or the possibility to find work or to cultivate the land to provide food is regarded just as important as shelter, however this vital aspect was not identified by ECHO as a need. It is the opinion of the evaluators that if this aspect would have been given just as much priority as shelter, most of the failures in resettlement projects could have been avoided.

### **CO-ORDINATION AND COHERENCE.**

8. For many INGO's, co-ordination seems to be tantamount to not overlapping. ECHO might start thinking of financing pools of INGO's, each with different expertise and skills, to carry out wholesale relief to the populations in need.
9. Participation of beneficiaries must include not only the beneficiaries taking an active role in the project implementation, but also being involved in the choices made, study of alternatives, the decision-making process and the way funds are spent, although the latter is little less than anathema to many INGO's. ECHO doesn't seem to have sufficiently developed its commitment to this aspect, despite being clearly stated in the CCP/FPC binding document. ECHO experts in the field should consider this point as one which had to be closely followed and supervised, and accordingly devise appropriate tools to put it into reality.
10. Concerning local partner organisations, ECHO should also watch meticulously the way its European partner interacts with the local entities. It seems ECHO tends to work very closely with its partner INGO's and much less -provided there is sometimes any contact- with the local entities, neglecting the fact that local partners often have a knowledge of the reality which is miles ahead any INGO can develop. ECHO could give more of a say to local partner organisations, thus benefiting from a better insight on how thoroughly and much in depth operations are being implemented.

### **EFFECTIVENESS**

11. It may be possible to claim that most specific objectives were achieved. However there is a lack of sufficient objectively verifiable indicators, not only parameters required. This still seems to be one of the most prominent shortcomings ECHO must come into terms with sooner or later. There were no indicators defined, and no way to assess the quality degree of the operation, let alone to quantify it.
12. Partners should assist ECHO improve the description of relevant objectives by clearly quantifying levels of effort and the results expected from an intervention. ECHO should consolidate the results, allocation of expenditure and actual expenditure for given periods that would permit more detailed regular monitoring and analysis of achievements.
13. ECHO could rethink the contents of its CCP/FPC regulations to allow partners to leave to their counterparts in the field, some essential items once the operation is over. ECHO becomes the final proprietor of all non-perishable goods purchased with ECHO financing. Those guidelines are already in place but are very seldom reinforced, which would require ECHO partners to declare the property and communicate how are they going to dispose of them.

### **COST-EFFECTIVENESS**

14. As has already been mentioned, the absence of performance indicators both in the proposals and in the final reporting, hindered any attempt to make an analysis of costs and achievements. ECHO should work relentlessly with the partner in order to elaborate a structured design to raise awareness concerning cost-consciousness.
15. ECHO could prepare appropriate guidelines to modify the way financial reporting is currently required. ECHO, and therefore partner INGO's, could start also recording expenditure by activities performed and not only by financed items as it is done now. However, more detailed planning of interventions would be required to link expenditure to assigned budget line items. This would allow evaluators to have at their disposal a full range of comparative data easily to quantify and cross-check expenditures. Secondly, ECHO could encourage partner INGO's to make more use in their proposals of instruments apt to objectively record appropriateness, efficiency, impact, etc.
16. Nevertheless, the evaluator fully acknowledges that in terms of contribution to the well-being of the populations in need, many parameters are necessary, and some of them are beyond quantification.

### **EFFICIENCY.**

17. ECHO must make a choice, either to set up strict regulations limiting the timeframe under which an operation must be carried out, and then extensions have no meaning. The alternative is a flexible "*à la carte*" approach and each operation could be designed for a desirable intervention period to have an actual impact, and therefore strict boundaries must be abandoned.
18. ECHO could develop more training tools to improve ECHO experts' skills in monitoring and evaluation. Although ECHO experts in the field were found to be exceptionally competent and sound professionals, they seemed to be lacking of a considerable amount of relevant instruments and proper training to perform their tasks in the most efficient way.
19. It is very recommended that ECHO take the initiative to organise seminars also for all stakeholders involved in projects, to discuss the experiences so far with these kind of projects and to see how an institutional learning process can be started. The evaluators' suggestion might be to organise workshops with all ECHO partners in every country where ECHO is acting

### **PERSPECTIVES AND VIABILITY.**

20. ECHO could face viability in two ways: duration and methodology:  
No proposal should be accepted by ECHO unless it clearly and unmistakably would define: 1) a hand over strategy, which exactly determines who, how, and when this process is to take place 2) a phase-out methodology and 3) a budget line allocated to a three-month process by which the intervention could be taken over by another longer-term institution or donor if required.
21. It is essential to develop an implementation model that encourages long term durability while meeting the needs of the population in the emergency or post-emergency situation. In this sense, the following elements should be included:
  - 1) Self-help or skilled labour from the village.
  - 2) Widespread community education and organisation.
  - 3) Participation of women at all levels of project implementation.
  - 4) The application of community management principles from the day of initial contact with the community through to the installation or handover to the community and subsequent O&M.

### **VISIBILITY**

22. Visibility ought to be subject to a shared, multidisciplinary approach rather than a marginal action carried out by the partner INGO's. Visibility guidelines should be enclosed in a Global Plan to be further discussed and agreed upon with the participant INGO's. Partners could pool their budget lines and design together with ECHO a coherent, consistent and effective instrument, with the help of a professional of the communication sector, who would be appointed and paid for that.

### **HORIZONTAL ISSUES.**

#### **A) Gender:**

23. Gender is a very complex and difficult issue which involves a huge amount of sociocultural, educational, economic and historical elements. Very few would challenge the need to reinforce it in order to contribute to a more egalitarian society, with a better distribution of wealth. But, when it comes to gender, ECHO would need the backstopping of well trained professionals. Unless a determined action is taken in that way, trying to incorporate a gender approach in humanitarian relief will probably continue to be a collection of badly defined and envisaged actions, on something as extremely sensitive as the plight of millions of under-privileged, under-educated, sexually harassed, overworked, and in many cases enslaved human beings, both in Central America as in other regions of the world. Therefore, ECHO could take a more energetic action to favour participation of women at every level of the implementation.

#### **B) LRRD:**

24. ECHO could play a paramount role in connecting the partner INGO's to other longer-term financing lines such as DGDEV, both line B7/6.000 and Food Security, DGRELEX, PRRAC, etc. It seems to make very little sense that ECHO partner INGO's are constrained to fend for themselves when it comes to securing a logical continuation to the operations already in progress. There is an obvious need for a more integrated approach within a longer, more development-driven framework.
25. ECHO seems to ignore the social implications entailed by the support it gives to the populations targeted. As far as health-related interventions are affected, ECHO can be morally accountable for not having tried enough to secure that the alleviation in suffering attained by an emergency or rehabilitation intervention that could have a lasting viable effect.
26. Linking humanitarian emergency aid, rehabilitation and development is a necessity. At this moment ECHO as office for emergency aid has been functioning rather separated from the normal development programs of the E.C. Also the structure of ECHO on one hand, and other EC-directorates like DGDEV and DGRELEX on the other, seem to play a role in this.
27. ECHO could enter into a thorough debate on whether it is an immediate emergency response donor or it is also a bridge toward longer development interventions, and that can be labelled as rehabilitation. If the conclusion is the former, than ECHO should abandon Global Plans -which are a structured comprehensive approach on rehabilitation- and concentrate on a three to five month pure emergency response (basic water and sanitation with cisterns and tankers, basic shelter, food, drugs and basic health care services, and so on) within individual decisions. If the conclusion involves also the latter, ECHO should develop the instruments to assume its responsibility towards a population who has some expectations for a better living standard after a disaster. Aid always bears a social side which must not be ignored. INGOs and ECHO could share that responsibility on viability of actions.
28. DIPECHO could develop a more straightforward protagonism in disaster preparedness, maybe by detaching itself away from the ECHO umbrella, and taking a leading role in those disaster-prone regions, a case

in point is Central America, where ECHO prepares itself to leave. This would entail substantial strengthening of DIPECHO's weight in Brussels, with a consistent increase in budget and staff. An answer from DIPECHO to the Central American region could be the setting up of a permanent regional office with enough capacity and means to address a fair share of the shortcomings in disaster preparedness this region still endures. This should be done taking very much into account the need for experienced and well trained personnel in disaster preparedness and prevention issues.

### VIII METHODOLOGY OF PROGRAMME PLANNING

29. ECHO spends a substantial amount of time on problem sharing with its partner INGO's at central level, and many of the regulations and guidelines adopted emanate from that effort. However, the evaluators had the feeling that ECHO limited its "concept of partnership" to discussions of financial, logistical and administrative subjects, and not so much on strategies, methodologies and decision-making instruments. Partnership is a two-way process and quite often this ends up being only one-way, they say.
30. ECHO as such has not still developed a core of specialised staff with an advisory role in technical and complex humanitarian issues. One frequent complaint about ECHO HQ's is that just very few of the staff with the responsibility to plan very difficult emergency relief operations, and take decisions entailing tens of millions of EUROS, have some experience in the humanitarian field, let alone expertise to deal with extremely intricate humanitarian environments. This shouldn't be a disadvantage, provided the person with that responsibility had next to him or her, skilled and experienced advisors.
31. What is lacking most within ECHO is the exchange of technical expertise between the ECHO HQ's and its partner INGO's, and between ECHO HQ's and ECHO in the field. ECHO gathered an extraordinary cluster of very experienced and technically skilled people, mostly working in the field, sometimes in hardship backgrounds. Very often, the experienced people work geographically isolated, with only sporadic contact with the ECHO experts in other countries.
32. ECHO hasn't built a supportive technical body at ECHO HQ's level in order to give the field experts backstopping and assistance. Neither has a series of well designed, thoroughly and OPENLY discussed operational technical tools (handbooks and manuals) been developed, focusing on the experts' different fields of competence and involvement to improve their operational capacities. The instruments designed to foster a sound project assessment and evaluation are sometimes ignored or underdeveloped, thus rendering them useless in the short term.

#### **Tools and instruments:**

Everyone interviewed along this evaluation agreed that the Global Plan is a valid, useful and well thought over instrument for decision making. But ECHO should stand by it. The revised CCP/FPC document is also a praiseworthy attempt to improve the quality of project proposal and accountability, but its implementation is at odds with old habits. However, introducing the Logical Framework matrix can be a welcome attempt to regularise different concepts and approaches, but it doesn't seem to go well with the almost obsessive concern of limiting ECHO to very strict pure emergency relief operations, exactly the type of interventions where the logical framework has little or no use at all.

The new Operational Framework, includes terms such as chronic crisis, post-crisis/ rehabilitation, and recommends to present the proposal objectives, activities, results, etc., on the logical framework matrix. At a later stage, indicates to "*State the indicators you will use to assess your performance in delivering these benefits*", but outlines between brackets that the disposition is not applicable for emergencies.

Some suggestions -not recommendations- are outlined below:

- Regular regional meetings between experts and in-charge ECHO officials should be scheduled and encouraged by ECHO HQ's.
- Flexibility should be encouraged in of the rigid financial rules and regulations which so far constrict experts into the field, and which match poorly with the diversity of the multisectoral tasks and responsibilities assigned to the them.
- Promote regular workshops concerning both the partner agencies and the experts in the field, in a way by which ECHO geographic officers can have a better strategic understanding of the regional interdependence between each other, thus strengthening their role and improving their competence. Geographical isolation of the experts, as it has been the rule in the past, should be avoided at any cost if ECHO is after a search of excellence.
- A redefinition and clarification of the role the ECHO experts into the field are likely to play.
- Detailed and clearly defined "Terms of Reference" for the ECHO experts, stating responsibilities, accountability, areas of competence, boundaries and limitations vis à vis both relationship with HQ's and with ECHO operational partners.

- A reinforced international status at every country of intervention to avoid a grey zone in which the ECHO expert currently performs his/her activities, that diminishes his/her technical authority and smears his/her role as a true international humanitarian representative in the field.

#### **LESSONS LEARNED:**

1. If ECHO feels that the completion of a proposal's goals, technically speaking, would reasonably take longer than the maximum period ECHO is prepared to finance, should carefully weigh accepting it against the harm it can cause to ECHO if the results end up being of a poor quality. ECHO ought to strengthen its capacity for cost-opportunity analysis, beyond the undeniable answer ECHO has given to acute emergency disasters. A go/no-go decision appraisal in financing rehabilitation projects is currently not present. Incorporating that safety valve in the project cycle in order to prevent failure at a later stage would be advisable. This go/no-go decision appraisal could be taken after site selection. An independent integrated assessment of the complete project by ECHO could be made (even if ECHO would only fund part of the project!).
2. ECHO has very little excuse to not having implemented what it is already contained in the revised CCP/FPC. As it has been noticed from other projects evaluations all over the world, a great number of problems do not seem specific for Central America at all, and merely seem to be generally related to ECHO projects in general.
3. Partnership is a concept ECHO seems to be developing at a very slow motion. Partnership is about two-way trust and neither ECHO nor the partner agencies show a proactive commitment to each other. How could ECHO start building a true relationship based on shared goals and humanitarian commitments?
4. ECHO has apparently learned that problem-sharing is something more rewarding and effective than a vertical approach. But very often it looks as if a sharing commitment between ECHO and partner agencies made in the field would stop short of reaching ECHO HQ's. It seems to be left to the ECHO expert's good will and experience to develop this problem-sharing. Different ECHO expert's personalities, expertise and cultural background bring in different attitudes. ECHO would benefit a great deal if it incorporated this process at a decision-making level.
5. It seems obvious that ECHO could profit from all the knowledge and skills its partner INGO's have developed all around the world. From ways to design, plan and analyse to monitoring tools, strategies set up, effectiveness, and so on, ECHO's partner INGO's could bring an endless source of expertise to ECHO.
6. The design of emergency programmes requires an investment of effort to allow sufficient orientation to be given to adequate objectives and indicators, which can guide the implementation initiatives of ECHO and partners.
7. The importance of the role of community education and organisation is not to be under-estimated. The investment in this field requires time, beyond the period normally allocated to implement ECHO emergency projects. Nevertheless, ECHO should adopt an orientation that permits the development of these important activities. The length of time allocated to the implementation of, for instance, complete water and sanitation projects is necessarily longer than the time traditionally destined to ECHO emergency projects.
8. INGO's have proved to be flexible and efficient implementation partners, which are the principle characteristics required at the time, or in the immediate aftermath, of an emergency. Nevertheless, it is evident that the work in the field of disaster preparedness requires an investment of effort that goes beyond the short-term perspective of emergency assistance.
9. The environment is probably the single most important issue to be addressed in Central America at present. The initiatives of DIPECHO and ECHO in the field of disaster prevention are an effective complement to current emergency programmes. Nevertheless, it must be taken into account that disasters in Central America, such as the effect of Hurricane Mitch, will worsen unless measures are taken to mitigate the negative effects of extensive environmental mismanagement in the region. Therefore, initiatives in the field of environmental management are of paramount importance to ensure that water sources are not prejudiced by deforestation and consequent changes in the reflectivity of the land surface or reduction in the infiltration rates of water to the sub-soil.
10. No rehabilitation projects, as it has been accepted ECHO Global Plans are, can achieve any meaningful durable result if they are constrained to a duration shorter than a range between 12 and 18 months.

## II INTRODUCTION.

This evaluation was completed at the request of the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO), in order to assess to what degree humanitarian operations approved after the hurricane Mitch devastated vast areas of Central American countries, brought about significant relief to the target population and also contributed, among other things, to strengthen the capacities to that same population to cope with disasters.

The Hurricane Mitch was considered to be one of the Western Hemisphere's worst natural disasters for the last 200 years. After passing through the poorest countries of Central America in November 1998, nearly 20,000 people were found dead or disappeared. Over 6.5 million people were directly affected and at least 2.5 million people became dependent on emergency relief.

This report presents the findings of the Independent Evaluation on the emergency aid ECHO committed to the four Central American countries (Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala). ECHO funded relief and rehabilitation programs in those areas devastated by the hurricane Mitch through three different decisions, the latter being launched under the framework of a Global Plan. A fourth decision launched on August 11th 2000 and amounting to 3.34 MEUROS, was focused on both Honduras and Nicaragua, and by the time this evaluation was performed most interventions within that decision had just taken off.

The first ECHO response took place on November 4th 1998, amounted to 6.8 MEUROS, and was channelled among 17 INGO's through 17 operations, namely Cruz Roja E, German Red Cross, MSF, Danchurchaid-DK, ACH, GVC, OXFAM, MPDL, Medico International-D, German AGRO ACTION, MOVIMONDO/MOLISV, MDMF, and ACSUR Las Segovias.

The second decision was issued on December 21st 1998 and amounted to 9.5 MEUROS. This time 29 INGO's were funded through 29 operations (5 were reconverted), namely AMI-P, Caritas-E, MOVIMONDO/ MOLISV, Hôpital sans Frontières-F, MDM-Gr, GOAL-Ir, GTZ-D, ACF, CINS, ANNF, Intersos-I, CR-AUS, TROCAIRE, GVC, CARE Int-F, ADRA, SI-E, Caritas NL/AUS, CRF, AMI-F, German AGRO ACTION, CESVI, MPDL, ACH, MSF, PTM, COOPI, MDME, HELP-D, CRIC.

The Global Plan committed 16 Meuros which were disbursed among 39 INGO's through 50 operations: German Red Cross, ASB, GTZ, MALTESER, PTM, ACF, Enfants Refugiés du Monde-F, CISP, COOPI, MOVIMONDO, TROCAIRE, OIKOS, Nuova Fronteira, ATLAS, CINS, ANNF, APS/CISS, GVC, GOAL-Ir, MDMGr, MPDL, SI, Handicap International-B, ACH, ACSUR Las Segovias, AMI, Caritas-NL, CESVI, German AGRO ACTION, HELP-D, INTERSOS-I, MDME, CRE, ACF, OXFAM-UK, MSF, CRIC<sup>3</sup>.

The evaluation was carried out by a team of three experts with both experience in the humanitarian field and in the evaluation of humanitarian aid. The three experts were chosen in order to cover the three different sectors of intervention as established in the Global Plan: health, rehabilitation, and water and sanitation. The team was requested to concentrate the study on the Global Plan mainly, as it was the most structured, comprehensive and strategically planned decision. The evaluation was conducted through the four countries where the aid was delivered, and involved extensive interviews with selected INGO's according to criteria of whether or not they still kept either regional and/or national offices open, and whether or not a local counterpart was still supervising in-place activities programmed to guarantee sustainability.

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<sup>3</sup> Data provided by ECHO 3 desk responsible for the Central America operations.

Around 37 projects were visited all together by the evaluation team in order to assess the impact reached and, where feasible, community-level meetings were held. Direct information was provided both by beneficiaries to whom a questionnaire was introduced, and by the INGO and local counterparts. The information resulting from this wide range of informants and sources was analysed by the team of experts to shed light on the way the aid provided by ECHO in Central America after the hurricane Mitch had a consistent impact on the lives and living conditions of the disaster-hit populations. It was also analysed whether the aid had strengthened the communities' coping capacity against recurrent natural disasters.

### III. A BACKGROUND TO THE EMERGENCY.

The Central American isthmus has historically been plagued by disasters. It is one of the most geologically active regions of the world, marked by recurrent seismic and volcanic activity, as well as hurricanes, forest fires and drought. Central American societies have co-existed in high-risk areas for centuries, even millennia. The history of disasters in the region is illustrative of this; practically all of the colonial capitals of Central America's five nations (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua) were destroyed and relocated at some moment in the past.

The perennial nature of risk scenarios present in the region has also fostered local coping mechanisms, measures to reduce risk and minimise the impact of disasters. However, many of these traditional devices have been dramatically modified over the past decades. Central America has experienced a rapid demographic growth, confronted with an extremely unfair access to resources and land. Prior to the war-torn decade of the 1980's, "the lost decade", the concentration of land in the hands of the elite, whose rights dated sometimes from the colonial era, caused massive migrations and subsequent expansion of agricultural and settlement frontiers into areas of higher rainfall. Much of the civil wars of the 1970's and 1980's sprung from the unjust distribution of land.

By the end of the 1980's, civil wars had profoundly changed the nature and spatial distribution of populations in Central America. Armed conflict between government and revolutionary forces occurred in many remote regions of Central America, where indigenous populations, such as the Miskito in Honduras and Nicaragua and the Quiché and Mam in Guatemala, suffered the brunt of these wars. These conflicts also produced large contingents of internally displaced population, migration and the swelling of urban shantytowns. Today, over 64 per cent of Nicaragua's population lives in cities, whereas a generation ago it was a predominantly rural society.

Most national governments emerged from the 1980's with far greater external debts to service, and all adopted tight structural adjustment policies during the 1990's. Already limited public expenditures on social programs were further curtailed to satisfy the conditions and mandates of international lending institutions. As a result, high levels of ill health, exclusion and indigence among both the rural and urban poor increased vulnerability. Uncontrolled urban spread and speculative land markets, together with rural control of productive land by rich land owners, pushed many marginal settlements into high-risk areas. The continuous expansion of the agricultural frontier into more fragile ecosystems, eliminating stabilising forest cover from steeper and unstable terrain, contributed to the exacerbation of floods and landslides during hurricane Mitch.

The meteorological phenomenon known as "*El Niño*" produced an unyielding drought in parts of Central Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Northern Nicaragua during 1997-1998. Massive forest fires destroyed over 1.5 million hectares of forests throughout the region (an area amounting to 3/4 the size of El Salvador) between May and December 1997. The peace process in both El Salvador and Guatemala led to the resettlement of displaced, repatriated and other highly vulnerable populations in several rural areas, many of them in high-risk flood-prone areas. Although most of these resettled communities can be considered highly vulnerable, they tended to respond to the emergency through innovative coping strategies such as local solidarity movements, community organisations and political lobbying.

All these factors created the conditions of social and environmental vulnerability that clearly existed prior to October 1998. The degree to which the impact of Hurricane Mitch was worsened by these conditions is outside the purpose of this evaluation<sup>4</sup>.

Mitch's first impacts were the immediate results of erosion, floods, land collapses, and landslides and mudslides. Floods destroyed thousands of homes, damaged bridges and aqueducts, and wiped out power and telecommunications systems and main highways. The hurricane directly affected one in ten Central Americans, the majority of them the very poorest who lived and farmed on marginal lands, steep inclines, river canyons and watersheds. Mitch's impact was worst in coastal flood plains and near river courses.

Winds, flooding and landslides killed almost 20,000 people (counting those still missing) and seriously injured 12,930 others. The storm left most of the population of Honduras and Nicaragua without dependable drinking water (flooding and particularly landslides wiped out over 2,000 potable water systems -chiefly in Honduras). Mitch destroyed or seriously damaged almost 80,000 homes, leaving up to 300,000 people homeless. Two million others had to abandon their homes and belongings. In the days and weeks following Mitch, thousands needed rescuing and immediate medical care, and millions needed humanitarian relief aid, in the form of water, food, shelter, clothing and other basics of life. Mitch also destroyed or severely damaged 25 sewage and drainage systems and 130,000 latrines, and its floods and landslides affected considerable stretches of rural and urban areas.

These unsanitary conditions, a lack of clean water and food would contribute to the spread of diseases in the weeks after the storm. There were 3,217 recorded cases of cholera (usually spread by the improper handling and cooking of food) in Central America in the 10 months before Mitch and 2,359 cases in the four weeks after the storm<sup>5</sup>. Cases of acute respiratory infections (ARI) and diarrhoea also rose dramatically. Leptospirosis (spread by rodent urine), which had been virtually non-existent in the previous year, reappeared. There was no significant increase in malaria and other mosquito-borne diseases like dengue fever, but the high risk remained. Serious damages to 30 per cent of Central America's hospitals, health units and other social service units made responding to these secondary impacts even more difficult.

Farmers saw their crops devastated, livestock lost or drowned, and their land stripped of soil at the hillsides or covered in metres-thick layers of mud and silt on the floodplains. Hurricane Mitch destroyed the livelihoods of thousands in a matter of hours or days. The humanitarian impact of Mitch was compounded by the later economic consequences of the chaos brought about by the wholesale destruction of crops, roads and cities. Damage to Central America's productive sector (agriculture, forestry, fisheries, industry and commerce) amounted to US\$4 billion. Massive unemployment and labour migration, as much as worsened levels of social services, public health and general poverty, further degraded productive capacity.

#### IV CONSTRAINTS.

A significant constraint encountered by the evaluation team was that ECHO could not facilitate the dossiers related to both the first and second decisions, and the Global Plan's operations at the briefing on January 9th 2001 in Brussels. Therefore no preparation could take place between the mission briefing and the departure for the field investigation. In addition, it was not possible to prepare the mission upon arrival in the field because of the emergency situation in El Salvador which changed, at the last minute, the proposed schedule. As a result, the team had to rely on the ECHO experts in the field for project visit selection.

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<sup>4</sup> Part of this description has been taken from the "Independent Evaluation of Expenditure of DEC Central America Hurricane Appeal Funds" report. March 2000.

<sup>5</sup> There were 2000 cases of cholera in October, so Mitch only exacerbated a pre-existing epidemic.



A file investigation could only partially be carried out because of incomplete files at the regional offices in Honduras and Nicaragua. Furthermore, too little time was available to carry out the minimal tasks while visiting the field. The dossiers and files found to be lacking, could eventually be supplemented with those examined during the stay in ECHO HQ's in Brussels between days March 13th and 14th 2001.

The earthquake occurred on January 13th 2001 mid-morning, that severely hit El Salvador shortly before the evaluation team travelled to Central America, wreaked havoc to the country. This substantially altered the trip schedule and planned visits. The team changed its original program, and went first to El Salvador, staying there between January 20th and 24th. There, the team members undertook an initial assessment of the damages produced and submitted a needs appraisal to ECHO Brussels.

In practice, this meant that all ECHO partner INGO's were intensely involved in tackling the serious emergency which followed the earthquake. From El Salvador, the evaluation team travelled to Guatemala, where the stay had to be shortened, and therefore less site visits were undertaken than previously envisaged.

As a consequence of the above, some of the country visits were altered, forcing further modifications to the short timetable allowed in the first place. That did affect, although to a minimum degree, the outcome. For instance, both in Honduras and in Nicaragua, it was originally programmed to visit some operations before reaching the capital and meet with the relevant INGO's involved. These same INGO's complained that they knew next to nothing about the purpose our visit, let alone the terms of reference, and subsequently could not grant the appropriate logistical support to facilitate the good execution of the visits.

It should be added that a certain degree of uneasiness among some partner INGO's was found during field visits, apparently due to the vagueness of the information about the objectives of the evaluation many INGO's declared having received.

## **V. METHODOLOGY.**

A two-pronged approach was used in order to assess ECHO's performance. One looked at the decision-making processes, supervisory visits, follow-up, and control and evaluation sessions carried out by both ECHO HQ's and ECHO experts in the field. The other one focused on the performance of the ECHO partner INGO's.

The evaluation team analysed on whether it was more representative to study the findings at every country separately, or else pool the findings together and, from this, extract general conclusions valid for all humanitarian decisions as a whole. The different decisions taken by ECHO considered the region as a unit, and it was the responsibility of the partner INGO's to assess and identify specific needs linked to different socio-cultural and geographic backgrounds. Therefore, it was eventually decided to use a regional approach for this evaluation.

This evaluation has mainly been focused on the 1999 Global Plan document, for many and well-funded reasons. The first and second decisions were taken as a reactive response to an immediate acute humanitarian emergency. Their appropriateness, relevance, efficiency, cost-effectiveness and actual impact reached, were subject to hot controversy and rather opposite opinions and feelings. Conversely, the 1999 Global Plan was a well thought over document, which carried a structured approach in terms of strategy, objectives and methodology. Assessing whether or not that structure met the needs is part of the obligations of this evaluation team.

Besides, the first and second decisions were taken in the heat of the disaster, aiming at responding in the fastest possible way to the acute needs perceived. Each decision was facilitated by a different person responsible in Brussels. To make things even more complicated, not only all operations were phased out long time before the arrival of the evaluation team, but much of the expatriate and local staff involved in their implementation, had either left, or were working in other regions of the country.

What appeared to be relatively straightforward, became a target almost impossible to meet, as more than one year has passed after both were over. To the ones who believed that ECHO tended to finance a small pool of well-known INGO's with a long-time presence in the region, and thus barring other INGO's which might bring some innovative fresh air to the "more of the same" ghetto-like approach, the second decision was warmly welcome. To those who were convinced that, given the singularities and complexities of the Central American background, only INGO's with long proven experience in the isthmus could deliver a sound performance, the second decision was considered anathema.

Hence, it seems to be beyond the capacity of this evaluation to ascertain whether the first decision was better planned and managed than the second one, or the other way round. Some key informants expressed their disagreement about the way the second decision was taken, while others praised it. Who was right or wrong? Therefore, it was considered unfair to take into account the comments about the two decisions gathered from the field, either in favour or against, which could not be cross-checked with some of the relevant players.

The evaluation mission was prepared by ECHO up to a high degree in the field. A major part of the logistical problems usually encountered during this type of work were avoided. The technical assessment has been focused on the project results of the implementing INGO's, although this is strictly and evaluation of ECHO, not the INGO's.

## V.1 TERMS OF REFERENCE

According to the Terms of Reference (see annex 1), the purpose and objectives are following:

- 1- Assessing the suitability of the Global Plans and the level at which the programmes have been implemented;
- 2- Assess the impact of the Global Plan in terms of output;
- 3- Assess the degree to which the objectives of the programme have been achieved and the effectiveness of the means employed;
- 4- Assess the role of ECHO in the decision-making process as well as in other activities for which the Commission services are responsible;
- 5- Analyse the link between emergency, rehabilitation and development and the link between strictly humanitarian and DIPECHO actions in the region;
- 6- Formulate an exit strategy of ECHO from the region, future ECHO funding which is deemed necessary and ECHO activities which could be handed over to PRRAC.

During the briefing in Brussels, when reviewing the purpose of the evaluation mission emphasis was placed on point 2, 5 and 6 especially the future role of ECHO in the region. During the meeting it was pointed out that the accent of the results should be geared towards 'learning' rather than 'accountability'. The emphasis was therefore placed on an analysis and assessment of ECHO policy rather than verification of all expenditures and related decisions. Thus, it was never the team's aim to focus on the INGO's performance in the first place. The work of the team was to analyse ECHO's decision-making mechanisms, supervising and monitoring instruments, and the process of aid delivery thereby. As per the TOR's the evaluation focussed on:

- **IMPACT:** contribution to the reduction of human suffering, creation of dependency on humanitarian aid, effects of humanitarian aid on the local economy, effects on the incomes of the local population, effects on health and nutritional practices, effects on the environment, impact of humanitarian programmes on local capacity-building, effects on the preparation, mitigation and prevention of catastrophes.
- **RELEVANCE:** of the objective, the choice of the beneficiaries, and the deployed strategy in relation to identified needs.
- **CO-ORDINATION and COHERENCE:** to other donors and international operators, as well as with local authorities, to other European Commission services that might be operating in the same zone with projects that are similar or related to those of the Global Plan.
- **EFFECTIVENESS:** in quantitative and qualitative terms.

- **COST-EFFECTIVENESS:** as established on the basis of the quantitative elements identified under the previous issue.
- **EFFICIENCY:** planning and mobilisation of aid, operational capacities of the partners, the strategies deployed, the systems of control and auto-evaluation set up by the partners.
- **VIABILITY:** the feasibility of setting up development and/or co-operation policies which could eventually replace humanitarian aid as having been provided.
- **VISIBILITY.**
- **HORIZONTAL ISSUES:** GENDER, LRRD,

## **V.2. SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

### **V.2.A. Primary Data:**

- a) *ECHO partners in the field*, in their Regional and National offices there where they still were kept operational. Because of the time span already passed between the termination of the projects and the implementation of the evaluation, some offices had closed and the agencies' staff members left the country.
- b) *INGO's local partners*. The team interviewed where possible the INGO's former local partner organisations.
- c) *Beneficiaries*. Where feasible, the team held gatherings with community members and tried to address the appropriateness, effectiveness and viability of projects.
- d) *Visits to projects*. All together, the team visited 37 projects and tried to assess their design, ways of implementation and visible achievements, with a focus on their viability.

### **V.2.B. Secondary data:**

As mentioned above, the team had to almost entirely rely on ECHO experts in the field for the selection of which projects were more relevant than others, and for consideration of the geographical restrictions the team might face to carrying out the visits in the field when matched against the constraints in time.

However, the team could consult the dossiers belonging to the interventions carried out in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua at the ECHO offices in Tegucigalpa and in Managua, albeit in some cases they appeared to be fragmented and lacking some files. However, completion of those missing files was carried out during days March 13th and 14th 2001, at ECHO HQ's in Brussels.

## **V.3. EVALUATION TECHNIQUES**

In order to give an extra value to the evaluation as a whole, it was decided to work as independently as possible during the field visits by sector, thus offering within the sectoral reporting, different approaches and methodological cultures.

### *a) Interviews:*

Separate questionnaires were used at every interview with: ECHO experts in the field, ECHO desk officer for Central America in Brussels, key representatives of ECHO's partner INGO's, governmental institutions, local partner organisations, and beneficiaries community members (see annexes).

b) *Field notes and project matrix:*

A standard project matrix developed by IUDC-UCM<sup>6</sup> (see annexes) was applied to every project studied, where both information collected through the interviews and data gathered from project documents were enclosed.

c) *Participatory observation:*

Every team member spoke to many people in informal meetings in order to cross-check information and to broaden background information. Daily interchange of information among team members helped to steer the evaluation along a co-ordinated line.

d) *Half-structured meetings:*

Several meetings were held with EU Members States present in every country, E.C. in-country staff, other E.C. services operating in the same zone, PRRAC, Food Security, DGDEV co-financing...

## VI FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

**IMPACT** (contribution to the reduction of human suffering, creation of dependency on humanitarian aid, effects of humanitarian aid on the local economy, effects on the incomes of the local population, effects on health and nutritional practices, effects on the environment, impact of humanitarian programmes on local capacity-building, effects on the preparation, mitigation and prevention of catastrophes).

The following text, quoted from the Code of Conduct of the Red Cross Movement, serves to orient the reader about the wider implications of the design work necessary for relief and rehabilitation initiatives and encourages reflection on the significant implications of the major relief and rehabilitation efforts that are implemented under the auspices of ECHO:

*“Effective relief and lasting rehabilitation can best be achieved where the intended beneficiaries are involved in the design, management and implementation of the assistance programs”.*

A great majority of projects implemented had a significant impact in the reduction of human suffering. Field interviews attested to the very positive impact in terms of the installation of installation of water and sanitation systems, better health care services provided, better prevention of, and fight against most prevalent diseases, new shelters and land titles. The actions clearly contributed to diminish the risk of epidemiological outbreaks, and substantially improved the health situation of the vulnerable population. Moreover, all targeted beneficiaries received a house and a land title, although in most cases resettlements were situated on marginalised land, which implied that, in many cases, subsistence farming was ruled out.

Projects where stakeholders could stay relatively close to their original environment had better prospects of successful future development but, for the majority of them, the situation didn't look very promising, since the beneficiaries were relocated far away from their original location. In one case, built houses were dismantled and abandoned.

It seems that the discussion laid not in whether or not ECHO interventions had a sufficient impact, but on measures taken to assess the degree of this impact and on whether this impact had durable effects in the targeted populations. An operation's general objective may or may not be achieved, but how substantially it contributed to reduce human suffering and for how long, can only be assessed by means of sound and thoroughly applied performance indicators. ECHO, despite of the existing amount of documents referring to and about indicators which are usually utilised, not the least the CCP/FPC<sup>7</sup> regulations, failed to explicitly request its partner organisations employ and implement them.

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<sup>6</sup> Instituto Universitario de Desarrollo y Cooperación-Universidad Complutense de Madrid (*University Institute for development and co-operation- Madrid Complutense University*).

<sup>7</sup> Contrat Cadre de Partenariat/Framework Partnership Contract.

a) Many of the beneficiaries interviewed didn't feel that they had grown *dependent on the external aid* provided, as most interventions focused more in helping them to develop their coping capacities by means of training, workshops, etc. However, although no actual evidence of dependency was encountered at the community level or institutional level, it has to be highlighted that about 50% of the housing projects visited will require some sort of continuous effort because of a bad choice of the resettlement location. This issue will be addressed at a later stage when commenting on durability.

b) Effects on *local economy and population incomes*: a large amount of the beneficiaries clearly expressed their satisfaction with the way the projects had improved their purchasing power, if only to free them from being forced to allocate an important part of their meagre income on medicines, as water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases had been chased away in many communities to a great extent, because of a better water supply and excreta disposal, and by their improved knowledge on how to fight infections. On the other hand, in some projects the economic position of the beneficiaries decreased by having more difficulty to find access to work relative to the situation before Mitch. A main bottleneck was the acquisition of suitable land for reallocation, and this obviously had a strong social impact.

The survival strategies of families often meant sending one of more family members away to look for work elsewhere. In some cases people decided to go elsewhere permanently and dismantled their new houses and sold the valuable parts (corrugated galvanised iron roof sheeting). Some people took the ordeal of walking long distances daily to the fields where they could work as temporary labourer. All interviewed people were happy with their houses but looked towards the future with great sorrow and regarded their lives after Mitch as more difficult and harder than before.

Another important aspect related to maintaining a house is the need to save money or other valuables in order to be able to pay for minimal maintenance expenses. For all projects visited this aspect, not only for the house but also for the water system or health service, implied big social problems: People are not used to think in this way, there is a gender barrier between the needs and priorities of a man as head of the household and the needs perceived by the woman, and there is a general lack of everything which makes saving a very difficult matter.

c) Effects on the *preparation, mitigation and prevention of catastrophes*: Most interventions included a disaster preparedness component. Those which didn't, put the blame on the "*short operational timeframe*", as partners could not allocate sufficient time for the training in preparation and mitigation and prevention, for the actions to be of any impact. Different degrees of commitment were found: one operation even set up a disaster evacuation drill where the whole population was involved (MDME in El Salvador), however, the majority included training workshops on disaster preparation, mitigation and prevention.

d) Effects on *health and nutritional practices*: Almost all projects with few exceptions, health and non health-related, had an integral component of health education. Field interviews clearly supported the notion that the health of the families had improved. Nevertheless, it was noted that the majority of Water Committees were not correctly chlorinating the water, which will have affected the health impact of the component

e) *Environmental effects*: The degradation of the environment was particularly evident in the watersheds of the recharge areas for the aquifers supplying water to the potable water systems. This, at a further stage, reduced the filtration of the heavy rains to the subsoil and, together with the widespread destruction of natural vegetation, led to increased runoff, which caused erosion of the fragile hills. All this meant less infiltration to the subsoil and consequently a reduced recharge of aquifers, and might reduce the flow in the springs or the level of underground water will be lower, thus leaving pumps higher than the level of an aquifer. In some cases, expensive investments made by ECHO to supply potable water may become inoperant.

Despite the imperative need for an improvement in the environmental management of watersheds, the "Strategic Guidelines for ECHO's action on Central America following Hurricane Mitch" makes no more than a passing mention reference to the theme of improved environmental management. Those strategic guidelines make no mention either of the need for capacity building.

f) Effects on *capacity building*: There is a significant variation in the skills vested in the community (e.g. water committees) between different partners. Individual INGO's have all highlighted the need to provide adequate training.

An overwhelming majority of all stakeholders interviewed, INGO's representatives, INGO's national partners, communities of beneficiaries, EU Members States, local authorities, national government officers..., described ECHO as the humanitarian agency swiftest in response, most flexible in adaptation, promptitude in fund allocation, and effectiveness in delivering emergency aid in the immediate post-Mitch emergency humanitarian intervention. Overall, almost all opinions agreed on the substantial impact ECHO decisions had made.

**RELEVANCE** (of the objectives, the choice of the beneficiaries, and the deployed strategy in relation to identified needs).

a) Most INGOs conducted their *needs appraisal*, their *choice of beneficiaries*, and the *objectives targeted*, in close co-operation with the local authorities. Thus, their relevance as such should be contested with the assessed relevance given to local authorities' priorities. Some information collected from beneficiaries suggested that this wasn't always the case. However, according to the findings, most operations assessed were showed to have made a good problem assessment and sound needs analysis, and this greatly contributed to heighten the *relevance of objectives* established.

A *census of beneficiaries* was included in the strategy of the majority of the interventions, albeit at very different degrees of complexity which were not reflected here -some agencies relied more than convenient on old censuses already made by local counterparts. A good amount of interventions also incorporated a *community diagnosis appraisal*.

b) *Coverage* of an area seemed to be and will remain to be a serious problem by lack of information about the needs beyond the direct boundaries of the co-ordinating municipalities. It appeared that rural areas which were especially difficult to access and where potential victims lived isolated, will always lack data. This problem was demonstrated again after the earthquake in El Salvador, where the actual damage in the rural areas was very hard to assess in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake.

c) The *response time* of ECHO seemed satisfactory. However it should be said that this was not a virtue of ECHO but of the INGOs, which could rely on their own funds during the time between having received a verbal confirmation of allocation of funding by ECHO after an event, and the physical transfer of the money involved.

d) The *deployed strategy in relation to identified needs*. A great share of INGO's implemented their activities, not only through the governmental already existing network, but also reinforced it, thus contributing to make their methodological design more consistent and technical.

**CO-ORDINATION and COHERENCE** (to other donors and international operators, as well as with local authorities, to other European Commission services that might be operating in the same zone with projects that are similar or related to those of the Global Plan, direct link with beneficiaries, etc.).

a) *Co-ordination with other humanitarian operators*: in co-ordinating complementary actions of INGOs it appeared often difficult to achieve it in an appropriate manner. For instance, houses were sometimes ready while the first latrine had yet to be constructed. Duplication of activities in the same area by different INGOs with or without ECHO funding was not found, when this seems to be a common phenomenon in acute emergency situations. However, rehabilitation projects are usually starting some time after the most important needs are met and better co-ordination is already in place.

It seemed that ECHO partner INGO's are not too eager to co-ordinate actions, if that means something more than simply trying to avoid overlapping. However, encouraging signs were detected in some areas, for instance in the *Valle de Polochic*, Guatemala. There, INGO's had built an impressive pooled body to share the same technical strategy, work in a rational way with the local authorities, use the same training approach, and improve their outreaching capacities by merging even resources.

b) *Co-ordination to local authorities*: All projects showed a level of co-operation with the local authorities. Some INGO's made an excellent job in committing local authorities to the operations performed. Not so much at central level, where only INGO's with a long-term presence in the country had developed links with the national authorities. However, some INGO's declared having had troubles in building links with national authorities because of the low profile ECHO had with those authorities.

c) *Participation of beneficiaries*: On the whole, many interventions included the beneficiaries in one or more stages of their operations. In most cases, these beneficiaries had a relevant characteristic which made them apt for being incorporated to the intervention (eg. community health workers, malaria control volunteers, bricklayers, etc.) but, in general, it seemed that the beneficiaries acted more of as passive recipients of aid than someone actively involved in the project's relevant implementation stages (identification and analysis, study of alternatives, decision making, budgeting control and follow-up, evaluation, etc.).

The design of many drinking water systems was the result of work of the partner INGO technical team, without effective participation from the village. Even in the villages visited where the community participated in the design, the participation did not include selection of alternative service levels with different associated contributions. Even the location of water taps was often decided by the INGO technical team and presented as a "fait accompli" to the village. The drinking water and sanitation systems were not generally built in response to demand but rather perceived need. The perception about the need could have been (more often than not) that of an outsider rather than a community member. It seemed that the duration of ECHO projects did not permit adequate efforts to be dedicated to effective community participation during design and construction. Sufficient time should be allocated to project implementation to effectively develop the necessary community support mechanisms that will permit the achievements obtained to become durable investments.

It was observed the best accessible regions had the highest concentration of different INGO's projects, and had a rather passive response from the beneficiaries. On the other hand, remote areas difficult to access from outside, community participation was high.

No specific details about participation of beneficiaries were found in ECHO "*fiches de suivi d'operation*", in spite of being clearly stated in the CCP/FPC second provision, which says: "*involve beneficiaries of the operation in the management of relief aid*", and also being given an outstanding position in the Global Plan's methodological approach: "*the beneficiaries, especially women, should actively participate in the design and in the implementation process...*". Some local informants approached declared that international foreign organisations "...arrived in the country with their ideas learnt from the places they belonged, and not always believed what local people told them"; some others said that "...they should spend more time in the communities, talking with people, and listening to the several opinions, and in the end, they would be able to tell what the people really need".

### **EFFECTIVENESS** (in quantitative and qualitative terms).

Housing and shelter is one of the components that has the potential to diminish the vulnerability of the targeted population. Other aspects are related to the social-economic context of their situation. It is possible that by providing shelter the vulnerability of the targeted population increases, because other components determining the overall vulnerability become more important. Two factors were identified as important: The first one is access to work and/or arable land, second one is availability and durability of other related services like water and sanitation, firewood for cooking and to a lesser extent primary health care services, light for social security, education and community building.

In case the target population lacks one or more of the above mentioned components it is possible that the general health conditions, including social disintegration and therewith its vulnerability, increases despite the fact that good housing has been provided.

The 1999 Global Plan specified “objectives/type of aid” for individual partners. However the content of the “objectives/type of aid” could at best be considered as “results” or simply “activities”. The global plan did have a “methodological approach” but failed to encourage partners to assume stated objectives in their submissions. The result was a large variance in the objectives stated by each partner in their proposals. Most final reports studied were impressive in the amount of achievements accomplished, but almost no one backed those results with appropriate technical indicators showing an actual decrease in cases beyond a list of consultations made, or actions performed.

ECHO was not providing sufficient orientation to partners in various aspects, such as:

1. ECHO did not establish clear objectives and results which were easily measurable and could be followed by the INGO's. The team is aware that there has been much discussion about whether the logical framework can be used for emergency interventions and this is broached in another section.
2. The standards, both in technical and the social areas, required for many activities to be carried out, especially the construction of water and sanitation systems, were not delineated to partners.

The effect of this variation in technical standards and techniques employed in the social area was a large variation in the satisfaction of needs. Some partners were able to construct durable systems, which respond to the needs of the affected population. Others have encountered simple difficulties in both the design and construction techniques. The impediments had an effect on the ability of partners to meet the needs of different communities.

Were six months enough to set up a sound epidemiological surveillance and monitoring system sufficiently viable as to allow the local institutions to continue it with a near-similar degree of effectiveness? Even though assuming the MOH in charge could appoint staff in a permanent way to accomplish the targets set up by the operation, and perhaps to increase the budget allocated to that specific program, how could they provide for the amount of transport an INGO could incorporate in the operation for the control and surveillance of, say, a dengue or malaria outbreak?

Under ECHO regulations, local transport is subcontracted, as ECHO doesn't allow for purchase of vehicles, and paid by with ECHO resources. It means that an operation (eg. that of ASB in the Dept. of Olancho, Honduras) could rent 6 vehicles at once to carry out the necessary detection and supervision of the health care network dealing with the epidemiological surveillance system. The achievements were impressive, but once the operation finished, those vehicles disappeared from the regional MOH office.

**COST-EFFECTIVENESS** (as established on the basis of the quantitative elements identified under the previous issue).

Cost-effectiveness in relation to the rehabilitation sector can be defined as to which costs of a minimal shelter per beneficiary can be built, and regional differences and demands should be taken into account. In principle it should be possible to make a cost-comparison between different projects using different housing concepts. For some projects, number of beneficiaries were well estimated and a ratio between money spent per beneficiary could be calculated and compared with other projects. But sometimes it was not clear if houses were only repaired or that completely new houses were built. On the other hand, in other projects the construction costs of a house were by the fact that the project may have been partly financed by ECHO and partly by other donors. This fact made a comparison purely on basis of ECHO expenditures a real challenge.

Technically addressing cost-effectiveness of an intervention such as that of ECHO is rather difficult. It can only be meaningfully carried out for specific, highly defined, components of a relief programme, and even then, great care is needed to distinguish between outcome indicators and process indicators. Further complication emanates from the imprecision in the relation of direct and, particularly, of indirect beneficiaries; different degrees by which aid gets to the beneficiaries, etc. A formidable difficulty arises from the fact that comparing humanitarian costs of delivering relief with those of achieving the same results with other means can be extremely intricate.



Splitting expenditure into “*direct*” (eg. expenses directly used to improve the beneficiaries well-being), and “*indirect*” (costs of personnel, both expatriate -which include overhead- and local, visibility, evaluation, monitoring and audit, and administrative costs), less than a third of all operations studied had a reasonable ratio of expenditure between budget lines spent directly on improving the population welfare, and those use for keeping the “machinery working”. And even one fourth of the whole had such disparity between institutional costs and expenditure aimed at the beneficiaries, that it raised concerns over whether ECHO should finance them at all<sup>8</sup>.

Furthermore, when the projects considered to be highly cost-effective, according to this criteria, were cross-checked with those having scored high in effectiveness (i.e. achievement of the specific objective, outreach of the aid delivered, and side-benefits attained), no direct relationship between them could be found.

Even though the ECHO “*Fiche de suivi d’operation*” includes a question about cost-effectiveness to be assessed in the analysis of the demand, almost the totality of analysis of operations made by ECHO didn’t include any cost-effectiveness appraisal in the final report evaluation. Only operations assessed by the Honduras ECHO expert -one-fourth of the total evaluated- included a simple mention of cost-appraisal in the analysis of the demands.

**EFFICIENCY** (planning and mobilisation of aid, operational capacities of the partners, the strategies deployed, the systems of control and auto-evaluation set up by the partners).

a) *Quality of planning and mobilisation of aid:* During the evaluation it was clear that the use of INGO’s as the implementing entities for the ECHO programmes was an efficient method of mobilising aid quickly at a minimum cost. Most INGO’s were solid and experienced organisations, with long track record in Central America and had a proven and effective strategy in place. They were able to demonstrate a developed degree of management, together with operational and administrative skills. Many INGO’s had different relationships with local partners, but as the analysis of this ECHO programme progressed, the superior knowledge of the local NGO’s evidently was a positive factor in programme implementation.

The selection of recipients responded to the description contained in the Global Plan for the partners visited during this evaluation. In general it was possible to note an increase in the number of beneficiaries from that originally proposed. This was the result of changes in the characteristics of the recipient community which were not anticipated when the project was designed. It is worth emphasizing that the increase in the number of beneficiaries occurred at no extra cost to ECHO.

b) *The timing of interventions:* considering that nearly 90% of the INGO’s requested ECHO to amend the length of the operation, around half the interventions showed no convincing reasons to request an extension (raining season, delays caused by the institutional counterpart, lack of commitment by the population of beneficiaries, etc.).

c) *Financial management:* changes in the budget allocation were not always considered consistent with sound financial backup, although ECHO accepted them all. However, and as far as the evaluators were able to ascertain, the European representatives of the INGO’s did not cause any delays in disbursement of resources. On the contrary, the disbursement of funds from Europe was agile. Similarly the INGO’s showed a high level of skills in the movement of inputs required for the individual interventions. In a similar manner, ECHO proved to be a responsible and agile partner, mobilising funds without delay.

d) *Logistics management:* Logistics were apparently well planned and designed, and effectively contributed to the achievements. Almost all partner INGO’s showed expertise in handling logistic requirements. The information obtained by the evaluators suggested that the purchase and use of commodities for the programme was implemented according to established ECHO practices. The implementation of the Global Plan with the co-operation of local and European NGO’s undoubtedly implied the rapid mobilisation of resources at a low cost.

However, some of the INGO’s were also subject to limitations, such as those in the technical field. On the other hand, INGO’s have shown themselves to be agile implementation agencies – which

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<sup>8</sup> One intervention, CRE in Nicaragua, was placed out of the study, because it meant just the subcontracted construction of a Health Centre with no other objectives involved and CRE spent 26,2% in indirect costs just for that construction.

is an important factor when responding to a disaster. In conclusion, it is felt that the rapid response to meet specific objectives, in response to an emergency, could only be achieved through the work with INGO's.

e) *Monitoring mechanisms*: Very few INGO's had impressive monitoring and measurement mechanisms in place. Most interventions omitted to include indicators in both their proposal or reporting documents. To what extent this is due to the limited design of the Global Plan falling short of setting up appropriate guidelines to outline the internal administrative and organisational controls that the partners should implement, or to the weaknesses belonging to the poor management tools of most partner INGO's, is a matter of debate. Not without significance, it was found that less than half of all INGO's produced what could be rated as good quality of reporting, with well structured proposals and reports.

ECHO has recently deployed new proposal and reporting formats, substantially improving the old ones, which were considered by the majority of INGO's to be too basic a tool for consistent presentation and reporting. The old format was clearly less demanding in the amount and the quality of information requested on both proposals and reports. This particularity notwithstanding, about half of all operations evaluated submitted documents showing a surprising lack of method: no editing dates were added to the papers, and sometimes it took pains to ascertain when a specific document was written.

Turning to the "*Fiche de suivi d'operations*", absolutely no assessment completed by ECHO on the projects' implementation, made any mention whatsoever to the lack of performance indicators found in the great majority of the operations evaluated. This, occurred despite the guidelines of the revised CCP/FPC, which stressed:

- State the indicators you will use to assess your performance in delivering these benefits. (**Not applicable for emergencies**).  
- Indicate and justify the results obtained compared to the specific retained indicators in the initial proposal (taking into account the modifications agreed with ECHO).

Revised FPC reporting guidelines 11.02.98

**PERSPECTIVES and VIABILITY** (emergency, protracted crisis, rehabilitation..., the feasibility of setting up development and/or co-operation policies which could eventually replace humanitarian aid as having been provided).

Probably one of the most controversial and thoroughly discussed issues addressed by the evaluation. A few elements deserve to be put into perspective:

1. *The interventions' perspective*: Although no one would question the lack of viability of an immediate emergency reaction, as was the case with the first and second decisions, with a duration ranking from 3 to 6 months, the Global Plan was a meditated, strategic, and structured delivery of aid. It took nearly 5 months from the moment the INGO's submitted their proposals to ECHO, to the start-up phase. All operations were confined, in strict observation of the CCP/FPC, within 6 months, "*except in very special circumstances...*".
2. The *Global Plan* was, therefore, almost unanimously considered as a *rehabilitation programme*, and no rehabilitation programme can endure the boundaries of a 6-month length -almost systematic approval of two-month extensions notwithstanding-, and pretend reaching a basic degree of viability.
3. The *strategies involved*: A short-term operation, up to a 6-month duration, has a strategy to last for exactly that time. Sequential short-term projects financed by ECHO have therefore an independent operational framework and cannot be included in a strategy of a longer-term approach.

a) When the above is agreed upon, viability was, the evaluators believe, one of the most striking shortcomings within the Global Plan. Around 90% of all persons interviewed coincided that most programmes financed by ECHO would collapse shortly after the INGO would stop its support. Although some key players considered this deficiency mostly related to the poor response of local institutions, in reality it seemed to be caused by a chronic lack of funding those institutions chronically face.

b) Very few persons interviewed could clearly answer to the question of whether ECHO funded operations were exclusively humanitarian emergency, or rehabilitation, or a mixture of both.

c) The importance of building links with development agencies is clearly understood by the partner INGO's, but the incorporation of rehabilitation and development issues in the Global Plan was rather limited. The ECHO 1999 Global Plan, chapter No. 3 quotes "...ECHO is strengthening its co-ordination with other EC services present in Central America (DGRelex and DGDEV) in order to assure a greater complementarity of programmes in the aftermath of Mitch". On the other hand, DG Relex representatives in Brussels declared: "There are no links between ECHO and EC development services which could fill the gap between emergency and development" (January 9, 2001).

Opinions in the field added up to the debate: "There is a blurred perception on where ECHO starts and where it ends. If ECHO is only about emergency, it should already be out; if ECHO is humanitarian, why now after 2 years.? On which basis decisions about when to enter and when to leave...? EC should eventually decide for once what it really wants ECHO to be, and set up clearly cut guidelines" (Karen McHugh, Food Security Honduras, February 2, 2001).

The evaluators could not find any actions that were adopted by ECHO in order to approximate INGO's funded with other services of the E.C. It seemed to rely entirely on INGO's responsibility to search that contact and win E.C. services -mainly DGDEV and co-financing line B7/6.000.

As a reminder, both DGDEV Food Security and line B7/6.000 are currently co-financing health operations in Nicaragua and Honduras. But B7/6.000 seemed to have frozen new decisions throughout the present year and perhaps the next, apparently due to a collapse in its capacity to absorb so many proposals submitted.

## **VISIBILITY.**

During the evaluation and associated discussions with community members it became evident that visibility should not be limited to T-shirts, signs and caps. The more fundamental issue of who is ECHO, how does the support get to the communities and what are the objectives of ECHO remain on the sidelines. The answer might be to change the emphasis from a passive approach to visibility to actively promoting an understanding of the programme, the strategy, objectives, sources of finance and origin of the finance. The proportion of the overall budget spent on visibility was on average 1,22%, within a range going from 2,03% to 0,17%. Very few seemed to be happy with the quality of the visibility achieved with that money. A good proportion of partner INGO's felt that the visibility implemented, as it was conceived so far, was futile, besides being disappointing, and didn't reflect the actual impact of ECHO interventions. Nearly 90% of those interviewed had a clear information about the INGO working in that area, but less than 60% had the same knowledge about ECHO-EU.

Moreover, there seemed to be a lack of information regarding ECHO activities as perceived by the respective governmental institutions. ECHO's very low profile regarding national authorities seemed to affect the notion they had about ECHO-funded actions. Almost all INGO's approached declared they would welcome a clear-cut attitude of ECHO concerning visibility: to establish clear guidelines, designed in co-ordination with the partner INGO's, in order to accomplish a visibility valid for both.

## **HORIZONTAL ISSUES: GENDER, LRRD, SECURITY...**

### **a) Gender**

The issue of gender was not given sufficient emphasis. Partners tended to gloss over the important issues associated with the role of women in a durable project. Only one single mention of "gender" could be traced throughout the Global Plan document (Chapter 6.2 Methodological approach). No wonder, therefore, that components about gender issues included in the demands were not scrutinised in ECHO's "*Fiches de suivi d'operations*".

The role of both women and men in the ECHO initiatives requires deeper analysis than that which can be afforded in this short evaluation. Nevertheless it was evident that the responsibilities of both sexes were not fairly distributed. The most striking discriminatory point was the generally accepted role of women in the home right from the cook through to the member of the family responsible for collecting the water. In the field visits and analysis of the work of each partner, only superficial initiatives were evident in the field of gender. In the rehabilitation projects, however It has been observed that these roles did have significant effects on husband-wife relationships. Among the most vulnerable were women without an official husband and with young children. In some cases a man lived with a woman without any legal status. In most cases the ownership of the house was given to the woman. But in some cases the ownership of the house would be divided equally among husband and wife. In case of doubt the ownership would be passed to the woman.

Traditional power differences between men and women are rather big. Women interviewed (temporarily separated from their husband) would testify that they would save money for maintenance of their water systems, health of the children or for small reparation of the house if they would be in control of the financial management of the household, but under the current circumstances they did not dare or want to raise the issue with their husbands.

In general women valued a solid house more than the men. This was due to that the men were agriculturists or were landless labourers or thriving on trade in the informal or formal sector. In the former case they would prefer to have received a piece of arable land rather than a house. People who never had been living in some sort of close community and who were forced to live in a settlement usually had all kinds of social adaptation problems. A social awareness program for women in one of the rehabilitation projects showed that domestic violence turned out to be a major problem for many women in this community. It would be interesting to investigate to which extent domestic violence is related to rehabilitation of people.

Although gender didn't seem to bear a negative burden in health-related interventions -for many various reason, maternal-child care tends to be one of the specifically addressed target groups in many health-related interventions-, only superficial initiatives were evident in the field of gender.

## **b) LRRD**

For a "continuum" to be successful, three principles need to be followed:

1. A hierarchical and time-bound sequence between emergency, rehabilitation and development.
2. A continuous focus on the same beneficiaries.
3. A concept of "integral approach".

As stated in the provision II of the revised CCP/FPC, "*Establish the linkage between relief, rehabilitation and development with a view to helping the population regain a minimum level of self-sufficiency...*". The ECHO 1999 Global Plan document reads: "*Most of the selected projects include an element with a long-term perspective...*". Nowhere was this inclusion to be found in any of the proposals reviewed.

The Global Plan focused on PRRAC<sup>9</sup> as the natural link between ECHO actions and a longer-term approach. Although ECHO had already included PRRAC into its "*Fiches de suivi d'operations*" as a desirable link, there was only one single mention to ECHO found in a November 1999 600-page PRRAC document<sup>10</sup>. According to the PRRAC established strategies, INGO's have only access to a small component -"Local Initiatives Fund"-, which considerably limits their participation.

A key factor in better linking emergency to development actions was to construct a house in a place where people would be able to regain an economical and ecological sustainable way of living.

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<sup>9</sup> PRRAC: "*Programa Regional de Reconstrucción de América Central*" (Regional Reconstruction Plan for Central America).

<sup>10</sup> "*Diagnóstico final de necesidades*" ACR/B7-3130/1B/1999/0302. November 1999.

## **ECHO DISASTER PREPAREDNESS: DIPECHO**

It is relevant to point out the overwhelming lack of knowledge about DIPECHO's activities many key informants expressed such as E.U. Members States, some INGO's under the Global Plan, local and national authorities not directly involved in disaster preparedness, etc. This is all the more remarkable knowing that the E.C. issued an appeal on February 2000 through its Website encouraging Members States and INGO's to use this means to disseminate initiatives aiming at disaster preparedness. Under its Second Action Plan DIPECHO allocated 3.500.000 E to 10 organisations, 7 of which were already involved in ECHO 1999 Global Plan.

Two positive examples were observed: in one rehabilitation project significant effort was made to counteract the on-going erosion processes. Tree-planting and reforestation had been carried out and had built awareness among the beneficiaries to protect their environment. Another initiative as follow-up after finalisation of a resettlement project was the set-up of a communication network with short-wave radios between remote communities and the municipality. Both projects were financed by DIPECHO.

ECHO should have as a compulsory requirement the introduction of a component of disaster preparedness and risk awareness in every proposal presented after a natural disaster decision, and this could well be developed by DIPECHO. Many INGO's expressed their complete ignorance on what DIPECHO was up to in Central America.

DIPECHO should make an effort to be known regionwide. It was unequivocally believed by many that the answer to ECHO's phasing out in a future should imply DIPECHO's weightier presence in Central America. And DIPECHO should therefore become the logical counterpart to those humanitarian organisations focused on both emergency and rehabilitation issues.

Although reviewing DIPECHO performance is out of the scope of this evaluation, some conclusions and recommendations on it will be added to the chapters below.

## **VII RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **IMPACT.**

1. ECHO experts could sit down with its partner NGO's in the field, both European and local, and set up a comprehensive and agreed upon list of performance indicators to be of common use in those operations with specifically shared patterns, although it is recognized that the development of objectives and indicators for emergency projects is not an easy task given the short notice that is generally available to design the initiative. Nevertheless, from the previous point it is clear that indicators and objectives should form an integral part of an ECHO emergency proposal.
2. There is a significant variation in the skills vested in the community water committees between different partners. Individual INGO's have all highlighted the need to provide adequate training for the water committees. The period of time allocated to the implementation of the ECHO projects, does not allow sufficient effort to be dedicated to the training of stakeholders. As indicated in the section on local capacity building, partners may not allocate sufficient time for the training of stakeholders in all the areas required. Training in preparation, mitigation and prevention of disasters is no exception.
3. It is felt that an ECHO supported component of environmental management is needed, linked to the water and sanitation programme, in environmentally fragile areas such as Central America. This should be especially directed at the river basins that form recharge areas for the aquifers and watersheds that supply the water for the drinking water systems.

4. The concept of disaster preparedness should be emphasised among partners to such an extent that it should become a routine component of any ECHO (or for that matter NGO) intervention in the region. Activities for disaster awareness, preparation and mitigation could also be discussed with partner INGO's, so they could incorporate this component no matter the time span allowed for the operation. Environmental management should also be encouraged as one of the most effective disaster prevention measures for Central America.

#### **RELEVANCE.**

5. The issue of what partnership actually means for both ECHO and its partner INGO's should be addressed without further delay. Either ECHO trusts its partner INGO's or it doesn't. One or another answer will infer a totally different framework and strategy to be developed. It seems that what is in discussion is not so much whether or not ECHO partners are more or less competent, which according to these findings they generally are. It rather is whether or not ECHO can take the leading role in humanitarian emergency response and share its goals with its partner organisations.
6. ECHO could make an extra effort in redefining the number International Non Governmental Organisations signing the CCP/FPC, with criteria agreed upon in advance with them, and then carefully screening which ones are actually capable to carry out the kind of humanitarian actions ECHO wants to share with them.
7. In immediate post-emergency situations, ECHO is not in a position to accurately quantify the levels of assistance needed. Nevertheless, the partner INGO's, particularly those which already have a presence in the disaster area, are among the best informed entities in the disaster affected region. It is to be assumed that the partners are able to quantify expected results in terms that go beyond the simple monetary expenditure. The intervention of ECHO was a clear response to the perceived needs of the affected population.
8. In the assessment of the needs of beneficiaries, "lack of shelter" is very obvious. However, it is recommended to evaluate the value of shelter provision against other needs. Of these other needs the most important is that of food security or work. Provision of and or the possibility to find work or to cultivate the land to provide food is regarded just as important as shelter, however this vital aspect was not identified by ECHO as a need. It is the opinion of the evaluators that if this aspect would have been given just as much priority as shelter, most of the failures in resettlement projects could have been avoided. In this respect it should also be taken into account that the western value of a house is of a complete different order for a rural or urban poor in Nicaragua or Honduras. Losing your house is bad luck but losing the soil to grow your food or to lose your work may be even worse. It should be kept in mind that provisional shelter can be made from local materials within a day.

#### **CO-ORDINATION AND COHERENCE.**

9. For many INGO's, co-ordination seems to be tantamount to not overlapping. ECHO might start thinking of financing pools of INGO's, each with different expertise and skills, to carry out wholesale relief to the populations in need. ECHO needs partners and not customers, who are not afraid to diminish their profile in favour of reaching a superior impact. ECHO should end the practice of allocating its funds not on needs assessed, but on the amount of INGO's willing to pick up a "piece of the cake" (this is mentioned with the most respectful of intentions).
10. Participation of beneficiaries must include not only the beneficiaries taking an active role in the project implementation, but also being involved in the choices made, study of alternatives, the decision-making process and the way funds are spent, although the latter is little less than anathema to many INGO's. ECHO doesn't seem to have sufficiently developed its commitment to this aspect, despite being clearly stated in the CCP/FPC binding document. ECHO experts in the field should consider this point as one which had to be closely followed and supervised, and accordingly devise appropriate tools to put it into reality.
11. Concerning local partner organisations, ECHO should also watch meticulously the way its European partner interacts with the local entities. It should not be forgotten that ECHO might be

lawfully responsible for a partner's subcontracted services delivered to the stakeholders. ECHO could integrate those local partners in designing the shape of the humanitarian actions to achieve a better fulfilment of needs.

12. It seems ECHO tends to work very closely with its partner INGO's and much less -provided there is sometimes any contact- with the local entities, neglecting the fact that local partners often have a knowledge of the reality which is miles ahead any INGO can develop. ECHO could give more of a say to local partner organisations, thus benefiting from a better insight on how thoroughly and much in depth operations are being implemented.

## **EFFECTIVENESS**

13. It may be possible to claim that most specific objectives were achieved. However there is a lack of sufficient objectively verifiable indicators, not only parameters required. This still seems to be one of the most prominent shortcomings ECHO must come into terms with sooner or later. There were no indicators defined, and no way to assess the quality degree of the operation, let alone to quantify it.
14. Partners should assist ECHO improve the description of relevant objectives by clearly quantifying levels of effort and the results expected from an intervention. ECHO should consolidate the results, allocation of expenditure and actual expenditure for given periods that would permit more detailed regular monitoring and analysis of achievements. The quantification of expected results would also be needed to allow sufficient in depth analysis of the efficiency and effectiveness of each individual intervention.
15. ECHO could rethink the contents of its CCP/FPC regulations to allow partners to leave to their counterparts in the field, some essential items once the operation is over. ECHO becomes the final proprietor of all non-perishable goods purchased with ECHO financing. Those guidelines are already in place but are very seldom reinforced, which would require ECHO partners to declare the property and communicate how are they going to dispose of them. This could turn into an excellent instrument for assuring a higher degree of durability. Vehicles should be purchased -as they are in many cases- and not rented. Communication items, computing material, etc. for use of the INGO, could also be purchased and not rented, and therefore would stay with the beneficiaries, once the project finished.

## **COST-EFFECTIVENESS**

16. As has already been mentioned, the absence of performance indicators both in the proposals and in the final reporting, hindered any attempt to make an analysis of costs and achievements. ECHO should work relentlessly with the partner in order to elaborate a structured design to raise awareness concerning cost-consciousness.
17. Performing a cost-effectiveness analysis over the different projects has proven to be very difficult. Local conditions are often impossible to compare with each other, etc. Still both for the partners as for the donor, analysis of cost-effectiveness is very useful. It is recommended especially for infrastructure projects to incorporate more self-control mechanisms. For example, setting up material balances on the amount of materials used on the total amount of materials bought and still in stock, and making someone responsible for this. Making reports on materials in stock in the warehouses and materials going in and out etc. Again the lack of experience on the side of the INGO with the implementation and supervision is regarded as one of the biggest bottlenecks.
18. ECHO could prepare appropriate guidelines to modify the way financial reporting is currently required. ECHO, and therefore partner INGO's, could start also recording expenditure by activities performed and not only by financed items as it is done now. However, more detailed planning of interventions would be required to link expenditure to assigned budget line items. This would allow evaluators to have at their disposal a full range of comparative data easily to quantify and cross-check expenditures. Secondly, ECHO could encourage partner INGO's to make more use in their proposals of instruments apt to objectively record appropriateness, efficiency, impact, etc.

19. Nevertheless, the evaluator fully acknowledges that in terms of contribution to the well-being of the populations in need, many parameters are necessary, and some of them are beyond quantification, for instance, infant mortality rates<sup>11</sup> and maternal mortality rates<sup>12</sup>. The amount of determinants affecting both an infant or maternal death are so varied and difficult to measure, not to mention that many of them can act as cofounders (eg. conditions which can artificially lead us to think that they are affecting the outcome, when they actually are not), that making the assumption that so many lives were saved by this or that intervention is often risky and misleading.

#### **EFFICIENCY.**

20. ECHO must make a choice, either to set up strict regulations limiting the timeframe under which an operation must be carried out, and then extensions have no meaning. The alternative is a flexible “*à la carte*” approach and each operation could be designed for a desirable intervention period to have an actual impact, and therefore strict boundaries must be abandoned. The present stand does no good either to ECHO, nor to the partner INGO’s, let alone to the beneficiaries, and also diverts considerable amount of resources by forcing INGO’s to stick to irrational and constraining time parameters...
21. ECHO could develop more training tools to improve ECHO experts’ skills in monitoring and evaluation. Although ECHO experts in the field were found to be exceptionally competent and sound professionals, they seemed to be lacking of a considerable amount of relevant instruments and proper training to perform their tasks in the most efficient way.
22. It is very recommended that ECHO take the initiative to organise seminars also for all stakeholders involved in projects, to discuss the experiences so far with these kind of projects and to see how an institutional learning process can be started. The evaluators’ suggestion might be to organise workshops with all ECHO partners in every country where ECHO is acting, to broaden and deepen the knowledge about performance indicators, and commit partner INGO’s to employ them.
23. Rehabilitation programmes in areas where the population is extremely sensitive on socio-cultural issues, should be run by personnel with a significant experience in those areas and, in any case, INGO’s should commit their staff for a reasonable length of time.

#### **PERSPECTIVES AND VIABILITY.**

24. ECHO could face viability in two ways: duration and methodology:  
No proposal should be accepted by ECHO unless it clearly and unmistakably would define: 1) a hand over strategy, which exactly determines who, how, and when this process is to take place 2) a phase-out methodology and 3) a budget line allocated to a three-month process by which the intervention could be taken over by another longer-term institution or donor if required. This would allow for sustainability once the operation is completed, regardless of whether or not ECHO, under very specific humanitarian aid, might eventually commit itself to continuing funding the intervention for another period.
25. It is essential to develop an implementation model that encourages long term durability while meeting the needs of the population in the emergency or post-emergency situation. In this sense, the following elements should be included:
- 1) Self-help or skilled labour from the village.
  - 2) Widespread community education and organisation.
  - 3) Participation of women at all levels of project implementation.
  - 4) The application of community management principles from the day of initial contact with the community through to the installation or handover to the community and subsequent O&M.

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<sup>11</sup> IMR: the number of children under 1 year-old dead per every 1.000 live births.

<sup>12</sup> MMR: the number of maternal deaths per 10.000 live deliveries.



## VISIBILITY

26. Visibility ought to be subject to a shared, multidisciplinary approach rather than a marginal action carried out by the partner INGO's. Visibility guidelines should be enclosed in a Global Plan to be further discussed and agreed upon with the participant INGO's. Partners could pool their budget lines and design together with ECHO a coherent, consistent and effective instrument, with the help of a professional of the communication sector, who would be appointed and paid for that. ECHO should bear very clearly in mind that allowing a partner INGO to spend up to a 2% of the total budget in visibility, not only means an outrage to the beneficiaries, but also shows a lack of concern about the necessary proportion between the need of being noticed and the money spent on it.

## HORIZONTAL ISSUES.

### A) Gender:

27. Gender is a very complex and difficult issue which involves a huge amount of sociocultural, educational, economic and historical elements. Very few would challenge the need to reinforce it in order to contribute to a more egalitarian society, with a better distribution of wealth. But, when it comes to gender, ECHO would need the backstopping of well trained professionals. Unless a determined action is taken in that way, trying to incorporate a gender approach in humanitarian relief will probably continue to be a collection of badly defined and envisaged actions, on something as extremely sensitive as the plight of millions of under-privileged, under-educated, sexually harassed, overworked, and in many cases enslaved human beings, both in Central America as in other regions of the world. Therefore, ECHO could take a more energetic action to favour participation of women at every level of the implementation.

Not surprisingly, as was already highlighted in the findings, there was one and only mention of the word "gender" throughout the Global Plan paper. ECHO could ensure that a demand responsive and gender sensitive approach to project implementation is effectively incorporated in the short project implementation time frame within ECHO's mandate.

### B) LRRD:

28. ECHO could play a paramount role in connecting the partner INGO's to other longer-term financing lines such as DGDEV, both line B7/6.000 and Food Security, DGRELEX, PRRAC, etc. It seems to make very little sense that ECHO partner INGO's are constrained to fend for themselves when it comes to securing a logical continuation to the operations already in progress. There is an obvious need for a more integrated approach within a longer, more development-driven framework.
29. ECHO seems to ignore the social implications entailed by the support it gives to the populations targeted. As far as health-related interventions are affected, ECHO can be morally accountable for not having tried enough to secure that the alleviation in suffering attained by an emergency or rehabilitation intervention that could have a lasting viable effect.
30. Linking humanitarian emergency aid, rehabilitation and development is a necessity. At this moment ECHO as office for emergency aid has been functioning rather separated from the normal development programs of the E.C. Also the structure of ECHO on one hand, and other EC-directorates like DGDEV and DGRELEX on the other, seem to play a role in this. The ECHO structure is transparent and simple. Lines between the main office in Brussels, the field offices and the NGO partners are short and the relationship between them is extremely good according to unanimous opinion of representatives of partner INGOs.
31. ECHO could enter into a thorough debate on whether it is an immediate emergency response donor or it is also a bridge toward longer development interventions, and that can be labelled as rehabilitation. If the conclusion is the former, then ECHO should abandon Global Plans -which are a structured comprehensive approach on rehabilitation- and concentrate on a three to five month pure emergency response (basic water and sanitation with cisterns and tankers, basic shelter, food, drugs and basic health care services, and so on) within individual decisions. If the conclusion involves also the latter, ECHO should develop the instruments to assume its responsibility towards a popu-

lation who has some expectations for a better living standard after a disaster. Aid always bears a social side which must not be ignored. INGOs and ECHO could share that responsibility on viability of actions.

32. DIPECHO could develop a more straightforward protagonism in disaster preparedness, maybe by detaching itself away from the ECHO umbrella, and taking a leading role in those disaster-prone regions, a case in point is Central America, where ECHO prepares itself to leave. This would entail substantial strengthening of DIPECHO's weight in Brussels, with a consistent increase in budget and staff. An answer from DIPECHO to the Central American region could be the setting up of a permanent regional office with enough capacity and means to address a fair share of the shortcomings in disaster preparedness this region still endures. This should be done taking very much into account the need for experienced and well trained personnel in disaster preparedness and prevention issues.

## VIII METHODOLOGY OF PROGRAMME PLANNING

33. ECHO spends a substantial amount of time on problem sharing with its partner INGO's at central level, and many of the regulations and guidelines adopted emanate from that effort. However, the evaluators had the feeling that ECHO limited its "concept of partnership" to discussions of financial, logistical and administrative subjects, and not so much on strategies, methodologies and decision-making instruments. Perhaps this helps to understand why some decisions taken by ECHO after an emergency, are not well assimilated by its partners in the field. Some partner INGO's blame ECHO for working within a vertical rather than horizontal approach. As ECHO is a hierarchical body, it often tends to mistake transmission of guidelines for problem sharing discussions. Partnership is a two-way process and quite often this ends up being only one-way, they say.
34. ECHO as such has not still developed a core of specialised staff with an advisory role in technical and complex humanitarian issues. One frequent complaint about ECHO HQ's is that just very few of the staff with the responsibility to plan very difficult emergency relief operations, and take decisions entailing tens of millions of EUROS, have some experience in the humanitarian field, let alone expertise to deal with extremely intricate humanitarian environments. This shouldn't be a disadvantage, provided the person with that responsibility had next to him or her, skilled and experienced advisors.
35. What is lacking most within ECHO is the exchange of technical expertise between the ECHO HQ's and its partner INGO's, and between ECHO HQ's and ECHO in the field. ECHO gathered an extraordinary cluster of very experienced and technically skilled people, mostly working in the field, sometimes in hardship backgrounds. Very often, the experienced people work geographically isolated, with only sporadic contact with the ECHO experts in other countries.
36. ECHO hasn't built a supportive technical body at ECHO HQ's level in order to give the field experts backstopping and assistance. Neither has a series of well designed, thoroughly and OPENLY discussed operational technical tools (handbooks and manuals) been developed, focusing on the experts' different fields of competence and involvement to improve their operational capacities. The instruments designed to foster a sound project assessment and evaluation are sometimes ignored or underdeveloped, thus rendering them useless in the short term.

### **Tools and instruments:**

Everyone interviewed along this evaluation agreed that the Global Plan is a valid, useful and well thought over instrument for decision making. But ECHO should stand by it. The revised CCP/FPC document is also a praiseworthy attempt to improve the quality of project proposal and accountability, but its implementation is at odds with old habits. However, introducing the Logical Framework matrix can be a welcome attempt to regularise different concepts and approaches, but it doesn't seem to go well with the almost obsessive concern of limiting ECHO to very strict pure emergency relief operations, exactly the type of interventions where the logical framework has little or no use at all.

The new Operational Framework, includes terms such as chronic crisis, post-crisis/ rehabilitation, and recommends to present the proposal objectives, activities, results, etc., on the logical frame-

work matrix. At a later stage, indicates to “*State the indicators you will use to assess your performance in delivering these benefits*”, but outlines between brackets that the disposition is not applicable for emergencies.

Below, it warns about the impact on human rights, gender and the environment, as it was already highlighted by the Global Plan, to very little avail, according with the conclusions of the present evaluation. It also recommends to take into account “*Perspectives of the humanitarian organisation in terms of linking relief, rehabilitation and development*”, but then adds that this recommendation is not applicable for emergencies. Consequently, is ECHO an emergency donor or is it not?

Some suggestions -not recommendations- are outlined below:

- Regular regional meetings between experts and in-charge ECHO officials should be scheduled and encouraged by ECHO HQ's.
- Flexibility should be encouraged in of the rigid financial rules and regulations which so far constrict experts into the field, and which match poorly with the diversity of the multisectoral tasks and responsibilities assigned to the them.
- Promote regular workshops concerning both the partner agencies and the experts in the field, in a way by which ECHO geographic officers can have a better strategic understanding of the regional interdependence between each other, thus strengthening their role and improving their competence. Geographical isolation of the experts, as it has been the rule in the past, should be avoided at any cost if ECHO is after a search of excellence.
- A redefinition and clarification of the role the ECHO experts into the field are likely to play.
- Detailed and clearly defined “Terms of Reference” for the ECHO experts, stating responsibilities, accountability, areas of competence, boundaries and limitations vis à vis both relationship with HQ's and with ECHO operational partners.
- A reinforced international status at every country of intervention to avoid a grey zone in which the ECHO expert currently performs his/her activities, that diminishes his/her technical authority and smears his/her role as a true international humanitarian representative in the field.

## IX LESSONS LEARNED.

1. If ECHO feels that the completion of a proposal's goals, technically speaking, would reasonably take longer than the maximum period ECHO is prepared to finance, should carefully weigh accepting it against the harm it can cause to ECHO if the results end up being of a poor quality. ECHO ought to strengthen its capacity for cost-opportunity analysis, beyond the unavoidable answer ECHO has give to acute emergency disasters. A go no-go decision moment in financing rehabilitation projects is currently not present. Incorporating that safety valve in the project cycle in order to prevent failure at a later stage would be advisable. This go no-go decision moment could be taken after site selection. An independent integrated assessment of the complete project by ECHO could be made (even if ECHO would only fund part of the project!).
2. ECHO has very little excuse to not having implemented what it is already contained in the revised CCP/FPC. It has noticed from other evaluations of projects all over the world, that a great number of problems do not seem specific for Central America at all, and merely seem to be generally related to ECHO projects in general.
3. Partnership is a concept ECHO seems to be developing at a very slow motion. Partnership is about two-way trust and neither ECHO nor the partner agencies show a proactive commitment to each other. How could ECHO start building a true relationship based on shared goals and humanitarian commitments?
4. ECHO has apparently learned that problem-sharing is something more rewarding and effective than a vertical approach. But very often it looks as if a sharing commitment between ECHO and partner agencies made in the field would stop short of reaching ECHO HQ's. It seems to be left to the ECHO expert's good will and experience to develop this problem-sharing. Different ECHO ex-

pert's personalities, expertise and cultural background bring in different attitudes. ECHO would benefit a great deal if it incorporated this process at a decision-making level.

5. It seems obvious that ECHO could profit from all the knowledge and skills its partner INGO's have developed all around the world. From ways to design, plan and analyse to monitoring tools, strategies set up, effectiveness, and so on, ECHO's partner INGO's could bring an endless source of expertise to ECHO.
6. The design of emergency programmes requires an investment of effort to allow sufficient orientation to be given to adequate objectives and indicators, which can guide the implementation initiatives of ECHO and partners.
7. The importance of the role of community education and organisation is not to be underestimated. The investment in this field requires time, beyond the period normally allocated to implement ECHO emergency projects. Nevertheless, ECHO should adopt an orientation that permits the development of these important activities. The length of time allocated to the implementation of, for instance, complete water and sanitation projects is necessarily longer than the time traditionally destined to ECHO emergency projects.
8. INGO's have proved to be flexible and efficient implementation partners, which are the principle characteristics required at the time, or in the immediate aftermath, of an emergency. Nevertheless, it is evident that the work in the field of disaster preparedness requires an investment of effort that goes beyond the short-term perspective of emergency assistance.
9. The environment is probably the single most important issue to be addressed in Central America at present. The initiatives of DIPECHO and ECHO in the field of disaster prevention are an effective complement to current emergency programmes. Nevertheless, it must be taken into account that disasters in Central America, such as the effect of Hurricane Mitch, will worsen unless measures are taken to mitigate the negative effects of extensive environmental mismanagement in the region. Therefore, initiatives in the field of environmental management are of paramount importance to ensure that water sources are not prejudiced by deforestation and consequent changes in the reflectivity of the land surface or reduction in the infiltration rates of water to the sub-soil.
10. No rehabilitation projects, as it has been accepted ECHO Global Plans are, can achieve any meaningful durable result if they are constrained to a duration shorter than a range between 12 and 18 months.

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