



EAST TIMOR

Disaster Management Capacity Development

Disaster Context

East Timor, also known as Timor-Leste since its independence in 2002, is at risk to a number of natural hazards. Each year, heavy seasonal rain falling on steep slopes causes frequent flash flooding and landslides, which are considered to be the two major natural hazards in the country. Apart from their potential to cause casualties and damage to rural communities, these events cause major disruption to the fragile road network, isolating communities and even whole districts for a long duration. From November to April, the country is at risk from tropical cyclones and lesser tropical storms, which can cause coastal flooding and wave damage.

In the dry season, drought conditions exist in large parts of East Timor. A delay in the onset of seasonal rains can become disastrous as fires can get quickly out of control. This year, the monsoon season started late due to the effects of El Niño, causing severe drought in parts of the country. This has had an impact on food production, and food aid has been provided to selected villages.

Geological hazards also threaten East Timor. Areas to the north of the island have experienced earthquakes of up to 6.9 on the Richter scale within the last 10 years. These can cause local tsunamis. A four-meter-high tsunami, caused by a major earthquake, struck the north coast of Timor in 1995.

In addition, other hazards exist, including pollution (particularly marine pollution); major transport accidents; epidemics; urban fires; agricultural hazards; including pest and disease attacks on crops; and outbreaks of exotic animal diseases. These risks are likely to increase as the nation develops unless necessary precautions are made and regulations put in place.

Project Title

Disaster Management Capacity Development in East Timor (TIM/01/001)

Sectors

- Capacity-building

- Training
- Disaster management

Funding

UNDP contributed \$300,000 from TRAC 1.1.3 funds.

Partners

- Asian Disaster Preparedness Center
- National Disaster Management Office
- East Timor Transitional Administration
- Government of the Democratic Republic of East Timor

Programme Activities

This project assisted the East Timor Transitional Administration during UN administration of the country and the government of the Democratic Republic of East Timor after independence in May 2002. It aids the development of East Timor disaster management capacity by:

- Providing training for Timorese officials at national and district level
- Supporting community education and awareness campaigns
- Providing scientific advice relating to the most common hazard, flooding (although the project will give attention to a wide range of hazards), through the establishment of a Geographic Information System for vulnerability mapping in the National Disaster Management Office, and
- Providing stockpiles of disaster relief supplies that can be deployed at national and district levels

The Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, based in Bangkok, conducted a training-needs assessment and trained more than 400 national and district officials in various areas of disaster management. As the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs closed its

office on 31 December 2000 and the national capacity for disaster management is weak, UNDP was designated as the coordinating agency for humanitarian affairs and emergency response. UNHCR is still present in the country and will be maintaining its operations for some time to come. WFP closed its operations in East Timor in June 2002. UNDP is therefore the focal point both for UN agencies and international NGOs in emergency situations. As this is considered a relatively heavy task, both in terms of the time required and the amount of responsibility involved, a Humanitarian Officer joined the office in early 2002 and was placed in charge of this sector. UNDP has also provided one international adviser to the National Disaster Management Office through its “200 Development Posts” project, aimed at building the capacity of key government offices.

It is also important to mention that UNDP has made a large effort in the reconstruction of East Timor after the violence that followed the 1999 referendum and has undertaken many major infrastructure recovery projects. Roads have been rebuilt, power stations have been rehabilitated and port facilities have been reconstructed. Water supply has also increased in large parts of the country and agricultural equipment has been provided.