

MINISTRY PAPER

NO.. 55/79

Report on Relief Operations  
consequent on the June, 1979  
floods in Western Jamaica



BACKGROUND

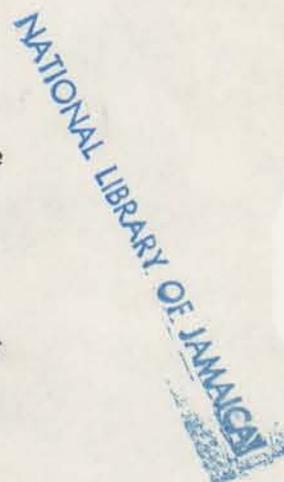
This Honourable House will recall that between the night of the 12th and the morning of the 13th June, 1979, Western Jamaica, and especially the parishes of St. James, Hanover, Westmoreland and St. Elizabeth was devastated by the worst floods recorded in the history of the island. It is estimated that the disaster affected approximately 160,000 persons to some extent. Forty-one lives were lost. Seven Thousand Seven Hundred and Fifty-Eight families, comprising 36,391 persons, had to be assisted with food supplies for varying periods over a span of 13 weeks. To cope with this emergency, a massive relief operation had to be mounted.

2. The purpose of this Ministry Paper is to bring Members of the House up-to-date on the programme which was carried out under the supervision of the Ministry of Social Security, and to acquaint you with the present position.

ESTABLISHMENT OF CABINET SUB-COMMITTEE

13th JUNE, 1979

3. Because of the magnitude of the disaster, the Prime Minister took the immediate step of establishing a Cabinet Sub-Committee on the morning of 13th June, 1979, under the chairmanship of the Honourable Minister of National Security. The Sub-Committee received from several Government Departments and agencies continuous reports on the extent of the disaster, and assessed the effectiveness of the relief operations. Other members of this Committee were the Ministers of Social Security, Local Government, Works, Agriculture, Health & Environmental Control, Industry and Commerce, Public Utilities, Communications & Transport, and Foreign Affairs.



EMERGENCY AID

4. It was obvious that the requirements for emergency relief could not be met from the stocks of supplies available to the Central Emergency Relief Committee (CERC) and the Jamaica Red Cross Society. Consequently, the Prime Minister launched an appeal for aid in cash and kind. The response from both local and international sources was prompt and generous.

5. Donations in Cash: The total cash received in Jamaica to 30th November, 1979, from local and overseas sources is \$941,976. From this amount, the total expenditure to date is \$488,256, leaving a balance of \$453,720 against which there are outstanding commitments to assist persons who lost their main or sole means of livelihood as well as household effects and personal belonging.

The main items of actual expenditure covers:-

(1) Repair grant for indigent housing	-	\$250,000	
(2) Mattresses	-	\$180,000	(approx.)
(3) Wharfage and storage	-	\$ 29,007	"
(4) Equipment	-	\$ 17,708	"
(5) Gas Coupons	-	\$ 3,076	"
(6) Miscellaneous minor items	-	\$ 8,465	"

6. Donations in Kind: Donations in kind were received in the form of food items, clothing, medical supplies, tents, kerosene oil, fertilizers, utensils, agricultural tools, and various services. Items from overseas were consigned to either the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), or the CERC, or to the Jamaica Red Cross Society, or to Church groups and organisations.

The gifts of food consisted mainly of wheat flour, maize flour, sugar, milk powder, cereals, tinned meats and

fish and cheese. Indicative of the magnitude of the feeding operation is the fact that the estimated value of the food distributed was J\$420,000 per week which puts the total value of food distributed over the period at approximately \$5,470,000. While the distribution programme lasted, the items which had been consigned to the Jamaica Red Cross and church groups were channelled into the system, and the distribution was supervised jointly by the EOC and the Jamaica Red Cross Society.

7. Donations of food received by Government after the closing down of the Distribution Centres are to be channelled through Feeding Programmes operated by the Ministries of Education, Health and Social Security to the areas which have been affected by flood rains. It is proposed that donations of clothing now on hand or received later, be distributed through the Local Emergency Relief Committees of the affected parishes and through voluntary organisations who can identify the needs and have the machinery for distributing the clothing.

8. The disposal of donations received by the Jamaica Red Cross subsequent to the closing of the Centres is at the discretion of the Red Cross, subject to agreement of donors and the League of Red Cross in Geneva, as to the use of the items.

9. Attached is a schedule showing the donations which have been received from foreign governments, Red Cross Societies and overseas/international organisations. These include a wide range of goods and services. Locally, also, the donations in kind included a variety of items such as food supplies, clothing, household utensils, recreation facilities for evacuees, transport facilities and services, collection services and voluntary services at relief and distributions centres.

APPRECIATION

10. The Government of Jamaica wishes to place on record its very sincere appreciation of the generous response both locally and from all over the world as well as for the various expressions of concern and interest which came from several sources, including many Jamaican residents overseas.

RELIEF PROVIDED THROUGH THE CONSOLIDATED FUND

11. Government, in full recognition of its responsibility to provide relief, promptly earmarked the sum of Two Million Dollars (\$2,000,000) to provide assistance in the areas of food, clothing, shelter and the replacement of personal effects. From this provision the expenditure and commitments so far is \$1,417,232.

ESTABLISHMENT OF EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTRE (EOC)

15th JUNE, 1979

12. In recognition of the need for a full-time organisation rather than a committee to carry out the coordination of relief operations, and also the inadequacy of the CERC to cope with a disaster of this size, the Cabinet Sub-Committee authorised the establishment of an EOC based at the Ministry of Social Security to coordinate the relief activities and report to the Sub-Committee. Mr Merrick Needham was appointed Director of the EOC.

13. The personnel for this Centre consisted of an office staff drawn from various Ministries, supported by liaison officers from the Ministries of Social Security, Agriculture, Health, Local Government, the Public Works Department, the Jamaica Defence Force, the Agency for Public Information, and the Red Cross who was coordinating the activities of voluntary organisations and church groups.

ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMITTEES (18th JUNE, 1979)

14. To facilitate comprehensive monitoring of the relief measures, Cabinet found it necessary to establish the following:-

- (a) A National Committee, chaired by the Prime Minister, to oversee the mobilisation of relief, examine proposals for long-term reconstruction, and to devise types of parish organisations which would enable impartial distribution of relief supplies.
- (b) An Inter-Ministerial Sub-Committee on Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, to mobilise the government agencies dealing with relief and reconstruction programmes.
- (c) A Bi-partisan Monitoring Committee, to assist the Ministry of Social Security to monitor the efficiency and fairness of relief operations.
- (d) A Flood Rehabilitation Task Force, headed by the Chairman of the Urban Development Corp. to coordinate the various relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation programmes, and ensure maintenance of a unified approach to the post-disaster activities.

RELIEF OPERATIONS

The relief operations were coordinated by the EOC. This centre responded to appeals or requests for assistance; assessed relief needs; followed up offers of aid; monitored stock levels; organized the clearance of relief items received from abroad, the transport, storage and distribution of supplies and the transport, shelter and feeding of evacuees; dealt with complaints; maintained an alert for possible disasters over the hurricane season; and kept the Task Force, the Inter-

Ministerial Committee and the National Committee abreast of all aspects of the relief programmes.

The field operations were carried out from:-

- (a) a supplies depot at the finger of the Donald Sangster International Airport, Montego Bay, where relief items were stored to facilitate easy transport to the west;
- (b) relief centres at Savanna-la-mar (serving the parish of Westmoreland), Lucea and later Haughton Grove (serving the parish of Hanover), and Black River (serving the parish of St. Elizabeth).

All field operations were supervised by JDF personnel from 13th June, to 22nd July, 1979. Civilian personnel took charge of the three relief centres on 23rd July and the Montego Bay supplies depot on 1st September, 1979.

#### Relief Distribution System

16. Initially, quantities of food were distributed to various centres in Hanover, Westmoreland and St. Elizabeth on the basis of preliminary surveys made by the respective Parish Councils, the Army and Ministry of Social Security Parish Officers, and also reports from local political and community leaders. (In the case of St. James, distributions by the Red Cross over a comparatively short period served the needs of the flood victims of that parish). Later, however, a relief card system was instituted following on (house to house) surveys, to ascertain particulars of families who, by the precise definitions laid down, were genuine flood victims. The first set of relief cards was issued on 5th July, 1979.

17. Final survey figures showed that 7,558 families comprising 36,391 persons were eligible to receive food aid. The distribution between the three parishes was as

follows:

<u>Parish</u>	<u>Families</u>	<u>Persons</u>
Hanover	156	588
Westmoreland	6,202	30,292
St Elizabeth	1,200	5,511
	<u>7,558</u>	<u>36,391</u>
	=====	=====

18. The new distribution system involved weekly issues of bulk supplies to distribution centres agreed on by District Committees, then distribution of prescribed quantities of various food items by Distribution Centre Managers on presentation of relief cards by flood victims. Clothing and other items were also distributed in this system and the issues were recorded on Issues Registers and on the recipients' relief cards.

19. The food distribution system ended on 22nd September, 1979, and the relief centres were closed at the end of September, 1979.

20. Throughout the operations liaison was maintained with the local Emergency Relief Committees (which are chaired by the Mayors/Chairmen of the Parish Councils) and also with the Poor Relief Officers of the parishes concerned.

#### EVACUATION OF CHIGWELL

21. During the period it became necessary to evacuate 18 families (109 persons) from the district of Chigwell in Hanover as a result of rising flood waters in the wake of further rains. The families were sheltered at Knockalva Secondary School and some were in residence there up to 13th September, 1979. Finally 15 families were relocated between the Mount Ward Teacher's Cottage and housing schemes at Shettlewood, Haughton Grove and Nyrere Farm, and 3 families returned to Chigwell.

CASH ASSISTANCE IN PLACE OF FOOD

22. After the food distribution programme ended cash assistance for a limited period was provided for those families which were identified as being so destitute as a result of the flood as to need further food aid. So far this assistance has been given to 1,633 families " at a cost of \$100,883 provided from the \$2,000,000 which has been earmarked for the emergency relief programme.

REHABILITATION PROGRAMME

23. The rehabilitation programme which is complementary to the relief programme will be the subject of a paper from the appropriate Ministry.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS PLANS"

24. Government has recognised the need for a permanent, full-time organisation to coordinate all aspects of national preparedness to deal with all types of disasters, to maintain the state of preparedness on a continuing basis and to coordinate the response when disaster strikes. Consequently, Cabinet decided that the EOC should remain in place for the duration of the hurricane season, or until the establishment of the necessary permanent organisation.

25. The EOC is now reduced to a skeleton staff, the original Director as well as the officers from the other Ministries having been recalled in August, 1979; and the liaison personnel have also returned to their respective offices. The EOC staff is currently engaged in completing the phasing out exercises of the Western Jamaica operations, supervising the provision of relief for persons who suffered in subsequent disasters (e.g., in the September floods), and working out procedures for the development of a National Disaster Plan.

26. Overseas technical assistance has been sought by Government through the Office of the United Nations

Disaster Relief Coordinator (U.N.D.R.O) in Geneva. <sup>Two</sup> Consultants paid two brief visits of one week on each occasion (in October and November). They held discussions concerning development of a National Disaster Preparedness plan; and made recommendations regarding the structure of the permanent organisation. Agreement in principle has been reached on both issues and the Consultants have proposed that their next visit be after the main sections of the proposed structure has been put in place.

27. The Government is committed to putting in place preparedness and relief machinery which can respond to future disasters in such a manner as to mitigate human suffering and minimise loss of life and property.

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL SECURITY  
30th NOVEMBER, 1979.

DONATIONS RECEIVED FROM FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS, RED  
CROSS SOCIETIES, AND OVERSEAS/INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

DONOR	AID RECEIVED	
	CASH	KIND
<u>GOVERNMENT</u>		
Australia	-	Agricultural products, purchased through UNDRO, livestock feed, etc.
Belgium	-	Agricultural products
Britian	-	Troops and drugs
Cuba	-	Sugar, blankets, etc.
Cayman	J\$ 25,000	-
Canada (thro' Red Cross)	*Sw. Frs. 35,550	-
China	J\$ 11,309	-
Grenada	J\$ 16,444.09	-
Guyana	-	Rice
Haiti	-	Drugs
Holland	-	Food, pumps
Japan (thro' Red Cross)	-	Canned food, etc.
Norway (thro' Red Cross)	-	Sardines, codfish
North Korea	J\$ 17,500	-
Surinam	-	Rice
Spain	-	Medical supplies
Switzerland (thro' Red Cross)	-	Cheese and milk
U.S.A.	-	Food: Flour, rice, milk, cereals Services: transportation Medical supplies
U.S.S.R.	-	Medical supplies
<u>RED CROSS SOCIETIES</u>		
Austria	-	Powdered milk
Britian	-	Blankets
Bermuda	-	Food and bedding
Bahamas	-	Food, clothing, etc.
Canada	*Sw. Frs. 12,870	-
Denmark	*Sw. Frs. 7,813	-
Finland	-	Blankets, first aid kits
Germany - Federal Republic	-	Tents, blankets, children clothing
Hungary	-	Canned meat, sheets, blankets
Japan	-	Canned food, lanterns
Netherlands	*Sw. Frs. 12,240	-

\* Used by Red Cross to purchase goods and services

D O N O R	A I D R E C E I V E D	
	CASH	KIND
<u>RED CROSS SOCIETIES</u> (Cont'd.)		
Norway	*\$ 4,800	-
Sweden	-	Clothing and bedding
Switzerland	-	Cooking utensils, powdered milk
Thailand	*US\$ 250	-
United States	-	Food, tools, fertiliser, drugs, building materials, servives
<u>OVERSEAS/INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS</u>		
Church World Services	-	Clothing, International Scout vehicle, etc.
Catholic Relief Services	-	Bedding and blankets
Christadelphian Bible Mission	-	Food
Cayman Islands Business and Professional	-	Food and clothing
E.E.C.	-	Food
I.D.B.	-	Tools, machetes, files
O.A.S.	US\$175,000	-
O.X.F.A.M.	-	Cereals
Jamaica Progressive League	-	Personal effects
U.N.D.R.O.	-	Cereals
U.N.D.P.	-	Cereals
U.N.D.P. (through World Food Prog.)	-	Luncheon meat
U.N.I.C.E.F.	-	Kerosene, utensils, drugs, etc.
U.S. Peace Corp	-	Volunteer service
American Airlines	-	Food
Ayerst Liberation (through St. Pauls Church)	-	Medical supplies
Montreal - Canada	-	Flour
Flood Relief Centre - Miami	-	Clothing, tinned food, etc.
Flood Relief Fund Drive	-	Clothing
Inter-alliance Trading Corp.	-	Chlorine
Ja. High Commission London	£ 23,220.78	Clothes, bedding, etc.
Ja. Embassy - Washington	US\$ 86,000.00	Clothing, etc.
Ja. Embassy - Venezuela	-	Clothing
Fay Lippman	-	Groceries and clothing
New Zealand Dairy Board	-	Processed cheese

DONOR	A I D R E C E I V E D	
	CASH	KIND
<u>OVERSEAS/INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS</u>		
Reddifusion Limited	-	Sauce pans
John D. Titus	-	Food and personal effects
World Relief	-	Baby food
Reynolds Ja. Mines	-	Canned juices, milk, baby food, oil, utensils, etc.
Carreras	-	Blankets
Colgate Palmolive	-	Bedding and clothing
Kaiser Bauxite Co.	-	Food, transportation, etc.
Prof. Gerald Morgan	US\$ 120.00	-
Mr. Ralph Bardowell	\$ 150.00	-
Jane Kirby	US\$ 350.00	-
Mr. & Mrs. H.F. Edwards	US\$ 60.00	-
Ambassador Keith Johnson	\$ 200.00	-
Ja. Progressive League	\$ 280.00	-
Ja. Mission - Geneva	Sw. Frs. 598	-
Miss C.M. Samuda	£ 20	-
Mr. & Mrs. E.D. Harris	\$ 50.00	-
Ja. Mission - Paris	£ 387.00	-
District 1199 National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees	US\$ 1,000.00	-
Alcan	-	Relief supplies