Cooperation in the Wake of Hurricane Sandy

The United Nations in Cuba
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It is with great pleasure that, on behalf of the United Nations System (UNS) agencies in Cuba, I share this summary of the work undertaken to support the recovery process in the areas affected by Hurricane Sandy in late October 2012. Assistance was provided either directly or indirectly to over 3 million people living in the provinces of Santiago de Cuba, Holguín and Guantánamo that were struck hard by the hurricane.

This is an account of what we have been able to do—and will continue to do—and includes the opinions of some of the key stakeholders involved. This will provide us with a record that will help guide and inform future actions.

It is similar to a high jumper aiming to clear a bar that has been raised by one centimetre. Knowing what has been done in the past and being aware of how to improve in the future is of utmost importance in disaster risk reduction management.

Sandy is not an isolated case in a country and region that are affected by tropical storms and hurricanes. Consequently, it is imperative to share our experiences, best practices and lessons learnt.

None of what we have achieved would have been possible without the ongoing and close communication established between us and the Cuban Government; particularly, with the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Investment (MINCEX) and the Civil Defence.

On this occasion, the agencies involved in the response effort were the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF); the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); the Pan-American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO); the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); the World Food Programme (WFP); the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Programme for Human Settlements (UN-HABITAT).

Alongside us, with a combined financial contribution of US$ 15.1 million, were Canada, the Republic of Colombia, the Republic of Chile, the Kingdom of Spain, the Russian Federation, the Italian Republic, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the Kingdom of Norway, the Republic of Korea, the Kingdom of Sweden, the Swiss Confederation, the European Union, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF); as well as representatives from decentralised cooperation, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and UN agencies, all of which mobilised their own funds. The work done with the Red Cross and various international NGOs before, after and during the response stage was also significant.

Let us hope that events such as Sandy will not recur; but if they do, Cuba and its people can rely on assistance from the United Nations System.
INTRODUCTION

Although the name makes you think of a small, mischievous and playful child, Hurricane Sandy swept through the eastern region of Cuba, becoming one of the country’s worst nightmares in recent years. It made landfall near the Mar Verde community, west of the city of Santiago de Cuba, on the night of 24th October 2012, with maximum sustained wind speeds of up to 185 km per hour and gusts of 265 km per hour. During the early hours of 25th October, Sandy wreaked havoc across most of Santiago de Cuba and Holguín provinces, as well as the western part of Guantánamo province. The hurricane-strength winds created waves that were six to eight metres high on the south coast and inland sea penetrations of 10 to 15 metres, reaching 50 metres in some places. There was heavy rainfall in the mountainous areas which are located on the periphery of the country’s central region.

At the opening session of the International Workshop on Risk in Cities (October 2013), Division General Ramón Pardo Guerra, Civil Defence Chief of Staff stated that Sandy caused the death of eleven people of whom nine were in Santiago de Cuba and two in Guantánamo (an unusual event in the Cuban context). In addition, 255,000 houses were severely damaged (31,353 completely destroyed), as were 721 healthcare facilities and 1,693 schools. Socio-economic infrastructure was also severely affected, including agriculture, mainly in Santiago de Cuba and Holguín.

Sandy is not an isolated case as tropical storms and hurricanes together with heavy rains and extended periods of drought frequently affect the country. During the opening session of the International Workshop on Risk in Cities (October 2013), Division General Ramón Pardo Guerra, Civil Defence Chief of Staff, noted that, “Nine major hurricanes have hit the country in the last twelve years, two of which were category five on the Saffir-Simpson scale. All nine hurricanes intensified rapidly, moving from category one to the highest category that they reached in a short period of time”.

The Cuban Government has strengthened its prevention, preparedness, response and recovery mechanisms between the months of June and November, when such extreme hydro-meteorological events are most likely to occur. These actions have helped minimise the loss of human life during hurricanes. The United Nations System in Cuba is familiar with the risk posed to the country and the Caribbean region by extreme weather events. It has been working alongside the Cuban Government for several decades in order to strengthen national and local capacity in integrated risk reduction management.
Cooperation in the wake of Hurricane Sandy
The United Nations System has been working alongside Cuba for over 60 years, participating in the efforts to reduce the risk faced by the country, as well as that of the Caribbean region.

The World Food Programme (WFP) made one of the first contributions in 1963 when it provided assistance to the people most affected by Hurricane Flora. Since then, over 75% of the projects implemented by this agency constitute actions that have been designed in response to heavy rains, hurricanes, floods and droughts.

Another example is the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which, between 1972 and 1976, implemented a US$ 3 million programme in Cuba financed by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). The programme set up 40 synoptic weather stations, 3 principal and 12 secondary agrometeorological stations, modernised laboratories (barometers and thermometers), procured transportation equipment and provided professional training. The three Japanese weather radars that were installed during this project are still operational in La Bajada (Pinar del Río); Punta del Este (Isla de la Juventud); and Gran Piedra (Santiago de Cuba).

In 2005, with support and funding from UNDP and other UNS agencies, the National Civil Defence started to establish Risk Reduction Management Centres (RRMC) in Cuba. The municipal authorities in the highest risk areas are responsible for the RRMCs and the Early Warning Points (EWP). These centres are provided with the resources that are essential to ensuring the effective planning and implementation of Civil Defence measures designed to protect people, economic assets and the environment.

During Hurricane Sandy, “The Risk Reduction Management Centres and its Early Warning Points helped
the Defence Councils organise the response through the deployment of generators, providing updates to the media and putting in place measures to protection the population,” said Division General Ramón Pardo Guerra, Civil Defence Chief of Staff, at the International Workshop on Risk in Cities.

Cuba currently has 89 RRMCs and 330 EWPs which are spread across the country. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) have also contributed to the establishment of the centres, as have the Spanish Agency for International Development (AECID), OXFAM and the Red Cross.

Ángeles Arena, an Advisor on Recovery from UNDP’s Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR), said that “all the experience gained over the last 50 years has created an exemplary system, and there are few other countries in which it works better than in Cuba. I think that Cuba has possibly the best early warning and evacuation system in the world, particularly with regard to hurricanes”.

A number of other agencies have also worked with the country on risk management and disaster response, each according to its specificities. These include the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); the Pan-American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO); the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the United Nations Programme for Human Settlements (UN-HABITAT).
Cooperation in the wake of Hurricane Sandy

Risk Reduction Management Centre (RRMC) in Tercer Frente municipality, Santiago de Cuba.
THE UN’S RESPONSE TO SANDY

As soon as it was known that the hurricane would affect Cuba, the United Nations System in Cuba started working to provide support to the country’s response. Immediately after the hurricane, dialogue started with the Cuban Government to obtain information about the extent of the damage (this was particularly complex as urban areas were affected) and identify the country's needs and priorities. These communication and coordination mechanisms continued to operate throughout the disaster response under the direction of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Investment (MINEX) and the Civil Defence.

Under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator, Barbara Pesce-Monteiro, the UNS disaster response mechanisms were activated. In conjunction with the relevant authorities, priority areas were identified, basic relief items were brought into the country for distribution in the most affected areas, and fundraising mechanisms were launched not just for the initial response phase, but also for the recovery phase. The UNS relied on support from, and coordination with other countries and international cooperation organisations throughout the process.

The UNS prepared brief Situation Reports (SitReps) in order to inform the United Nations and the international community about the scale of the damage. These reports allowed both the United Nations and other international cooperation stakeholders design rapid responses to the disaster.

Immediate support was received from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the agency specialised in disaster response.

The heads of resident UN agencies in Cuba who constitute the Country Team, agreed that the main achievements of the response to the damage caused by Sandy were the rapid and effective coordination in mobilising aid; the cooperation between the agencies and with the national authorities; and the contribution of the Situation Reports.

The Civil Defence Chief of Staff spoke about cooperation with the United Nations in Santiago de Cuba stating that,
“We have always worked very closely; there has been a willingness to assist after each event that has affected us. After Hurricane Sandy, they moved swiftly to provide all the assistance required by the eastern provinces. I believe the work they have been doing is very positive. The United Nations also recognise the work done by the Civil Defence to assist the population. I believe that we work in a disciplined and organised way, with a commitment to solving problems”.

The following agencies have all been involved in the response effort: the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF); the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); the Pan-American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO); the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); the World Food Programme (WFP); the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Programme for Human Settlements (UN-HABITAT).

The UNS response used a phased, sectoral approach to include shelter, food security, water and sanitation, health and education.
Arrival of the first United Nations humanitarian aid flight

A ship docked at Santiago de Cuba port carrying 793 MT of WFP food
On 8th and 10th November 2012, two flights arrived with 81 tons of humanitarian assistance, mobilised using funds from OCHA, UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF (tarpaulins, water purification tablets, water tanks, kitchen sets, hygiene kits and educational kits). The planes landed at Antonio Maceo airport in Santiago de Cuba, a city which initially received the majority of the aid owing to the extent of the damage.

In December, 793 tons of food from WFP arrived by ship (rice, beans, oil), as well as temporary storage facilities. Later, a second delivery of 593.3 MT of food arrived.

The UNS in Cuba, in conjunction with the authorities, immediately presented proposals to the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), a mechanism managed by OCHA to allow a rapid response to emergencies. US$ 5.5 million were approved, benefitting over one million people in Santiago de Cuba, Holguín and Guantánamo.

The funds were used to procure roofing sheets and tarpaulins, water purification tablets, water tanks, mosquito nets, tool kits, kitchen sets, hygiene kits, medical equipment/supplies, and agricultural inputs, all of which were essential for the most affected people.

The aid provided by the different agencies was extended to the provinces of Holguín and Guantánamo that were also amongst the worst affected by Hurricane Sandy.

The response was coordinated through the Plan of Action, the mechanism which allowed the different organisations
### PHASING OF THE RESPONSE BY THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM IN CUBA

THE PLAN OF ACTION INCLUDES THE PREVIOUS RESPONSE PHASES (IMMEDIATE RESPONSE PHASE AND THE CENTRAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE FUND).

TOTAL RESOURCES MOBILISED: US$ 15.1 MILLION.

### CITY OF SANTIAGO DE CUBA:

**BY AIR**
- 81 TONNES – US$ 448,125 (8TH-10TH NOVEMBER)
- TARPALUNS, WATER PURIFICATION TABLETS, WATER TANKS, KITCHEN SETS, HYGIENE KITS, EDUCATIONAL KITS, (AGENCIES: OCHA, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF)

**BY SEA**
- 793 TONNES OF FOOD
- US$ 1 MILLION (2ND DECEMBER)
- RICE, BEANS, OIL TEMPORARY STORAGE FACILITIES (AGENCY: WFP)

### PLAN OF ACTION

#### IMMEDIATE RESPONSE PHASE

**Estimated number of Beneficiaries:**
- Over 1 million people in the provinces of Santiago de Cuba, Holguín and Guantánamo

**US$ 5.5 Million Mobilised**

**Priority Sectors:**
- Shelter and Recovery (UNDP)
- Food Security (FAO and WFP)
- Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (UNICEF)
- Health (PAHO/WHO and UNFPA)
- Education (UNICEF)

#### CENTRAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE FUND (CERF)

**Estimated number of Beneficiaries:**
- 300,000 - Shelter and Roofing
- 2.2 Million - Food Security
- 60,000 - Water, Hygiene and Sanitation
- 2.6 Million - Health
- 185,000 - Education

**US$ 15.1 Million Mobilised**

**Priority Sectors:**
- Shelter and Recovery (UNDP and UN-HABITAT)
- Food Security (WFP, FAO and UNDP)
- Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (UNICEF and UNDP)
- Health (PAHO/WHO, UNFPA and UNDP)
- Education (UNICEF)
- Coordination (ORC)
involved in international cooperation to support the UNS initiatives in Cuba. A considerable number of recovery-oriented projects within the Plan of Action have been implemented by the agencies in line with the country’s priorities. The Plan was presented to the Diplomatic Corps based in Cuba in mid-November 2012, and subsequently submitted to the UN Headquarters in New York.

María Luisa Bueno, a MINEX delegate in the eastern provinces, said, “The assistance was very well designed” by the United Nations System, as it outlined a strategy with a clear distinction between “what the focus should be during the emergency phase and what the focus should be during the recovery phase.”
Distributed of the kitchen sets to the people affected by Hurricane Sandy
Support received through the United Nations benefitted nearly three million people directly or indirectly in the three Cuban provinces that were hardest hit by Hurricane Sandy.
As noted by the UNS Resident Coordinator in Cuba, Barbara Pesce-Monteiro, the UN assistance would not have been possible without the financial contribution of US$ 15.1 million, donated by Canada (nearly US$ 240,000), the Republic of Chile (US$ 15,000), the Republic of Colombia (US$ 50,000), the European Union (more than US$ 2,138,000), the Italian Republic (more than US$ 337,000), the Republic of Korea (US$ 200,000), the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (over US$ 193,000), the Kingdom of Norway (US$ 480,000), the Russian Federation (US$ 2 million), the Kingdom of Spain (nearly US$ 25,000), the Kingdom of Sweden (US$ 750,000), the Swiss Confederation (US$ 500,000), the Central Emergency Response Fund (more than US$ 5,522,000), as well as decentralized cooperation and non-governmental organizations (over US$ 530,000) and UN agencies, which mobilised internal funding (nearly US$ 2,127,000).
The work carried out with the Red Cross and various international NGOs both prior to, and during the response was of great importance. Support provided by the Red Cross in Santiago de Cuba facilitated coordination on the ground between the UNS agencies and their counterparts for the delivery of humanitarian aid. This was based on the Red Cross’s experience in disaster situations and its relationship with the Government, being part of the nationwide Civil Defence system.

During the International Workshop on Risk in Cities held in October 2013, the President of the Provincial Assembly of the Poder Popular (Provincial Government) in Santiago de Cuba, Reinaldo García Zapata, said, “Never before did the international community, its main bodies, non-governmental organisations, agencies and governments from all over the continent engage in such a rapid response sending countless supplies to address needs such as food and water. A large number of dignitaries, technical staff and diplomats arrived in Santiago de Cuba to deliver humanitarian aid, but most of all to express their solidarity with the people and the authorities.”

He noted that the United Nations System in Cuba had a special role with regard to the assistance “owing to its perseverance, its direct and timely commitment and the sensitivity of its senior officials and technical staff, who are still working alongside us.”

A year after Hurricane Sandy, the majority of the funds had been spent, and the supplies procured through the United Nations have already been distributed to the affected provinces or are on their way to the country. As has been confirmed by the United Nations System Resident Coordinator in Cuba, assistance to the affected provinces will continue throughout 2014 in line with their recovery and development.

These provinces are currently demonstrating clear signs of recovery owing to the concern shown and rapid actions undertaken by the Cuban Government and owing to the support provided by the international community. This does not mean that the damage caused by Hurricane Sandy is now something of the past; there still much work to do as has been acknowledged by the government authorities in the affected provinces.
Families and communities from the three provinces damaged by Sandy benefited from water tanks and plastic containers to store water for household consumption.
WATER AND SANITATION

During the immediate response phase of the humanitarian effort, UNICEF, with CERF funding, sent the following items to Santiago de Cuba: drinking water storage tanks, plastic containers, water purification tablets and mosquito nets. All inputs improved the access to safe water and hygiene in the affected communities.

The funds provided by the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the Russian Federation have also been instrumental in improving the access to drinking water and the hygiene conditions of the population, prioritising the most vulnerable groups (children, pregnant and breastfeeding women). The actions also reduced the risk of emerging diseases in the most badly affected communities by securing a safe water supply and hygiene facilities, to include those in schools.

Gerardo Ginarte Sánchez, Provincial Deputy for Investment at IRH, explained that they reacted immediately when the United Nations expressed an interest in providing assistance to this strategic sector. Two projects were put forward to improve access to safe water and hygiene in affected communities in Santiago de Cuba, to include the procurement of pumps, water purification and water analysis equipment. The equipment has already arrived in Cuba and will improve the water distribution system that supplies nearly 140,000 people in Palma Soriano, Songo La Maya, II Frente, III Frente, Mella, Contramaestre and San Luis municipalities.

Begoña Arellano, the UNICEF Representative in Cuba, points out that “the tanks, and particularly the pumping and purification equipment that they are receiving will also help them in the future”.

With important financial support from the European Community Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), UNDP, UNICEF and UN-HABITAT made an effective contribution to the prevention of acute diarrheal diseases and the improvement of hygiene. This was achieved through supporting the Ministry of Public Health host workshops and print educational materials.

The ECHO funding also allowed UN-HABITAT to implement a project in Palma Soriano to promote ecological toilets which convert solid waste into manure, thereby improving the waste treatment system (a problem

Graciela Perrand Robert, Deputy Assistant from the Institute of Water Resources (IRH) in Santiago de Cuba, said that before Hurricane Sandy the situation concerning the pumping systems was already difficult, but that it undoubtedly worsened with the damage inflicted by the hurricane. The contamination of the water supply caused the hygiene and sanitary conditions to deteriorate.
Families and communities in the three affected provinces benefitted from tanks and plastic containers to store drinking water.

in this municipality) and decreasing the contamination of the water table and the course of the Cauto River.

Dr. Raúl Leyva Caballero, Director at the Centre for Health Promotion and Education in Santiago de Cuba noted that the first workshop on the prevention of acute diarrheic diseases was held in the city of Palma Soriano, owing to the difficult situation there at the time. The workshop was funded by UNDP, UNICEF and UN-HABITAT and was attended by over 60 people from Tercer Frente, Contramaestre, Mella, San Luis and Songo-La Maya municipalities.

“The work was done comprehensively, as we involved formal and informal community leaders, primary healthcare staff, family doctors and nurses, and managers from the core working groups. The topics covered included
health promotion, prevention of acute diarrheic diseases, environmental protection, water management and water treatment. The workshop ended with the design of a plan of action to strengthen prevention. Two months later very positive results were seen in Palma Soriano. Subsequently, we organised a second workshop in Santiago de Cuba to address that municipality’s needs, and those of Guamá.”

Dr Leyva stated that donor support has been of the utmost importance. “Without their help, we would not have been able to run such a high quality workshop with such large levels of participation. We had never worked with these agencies before, and their contribution is now part of our wealth of resources.”
The United Nations in Cuba
With funding from CERF, the World Food Programme (WFP) supplied 1,386.3 MT (rice, beans and oil) to beneficiaries in Santiago de Cuba, Holguín and Guantánamo provinces. In particular, assistance was given to vulnerable groups to include school-age children, pregnant women, elderly people and people on low incomes who benefit from the Family Care System. An additional contribution was received from Republic of Korea for the procurement of rice.

Elbis Sayoux Chibás, Head of the Health Planning Department in Guantánamo, emphasises the importance of the assistance received for maternity homes, the elderly, senior citizens’ clubs and at a home for children with physical and intellectual disabilities. “The food received helped strengthen food provision in those institutions as they were affected by the reduction in the production of roots and tubers, vegetables and cereals due to Hurricane Sandy. These items covered the shortfall that was affecting these people’s nutrition. We are very grateful, as are the 1,043 individuals benefiting from the donations, of whom 338 are in maternity homes, 465 in homes for the elderly, and 205 are members of senior citizens’ clubs.”

Ermes Pérez Caminero, Project Coordinator from the Provincial Education Division in Guantánamo, adds that the food from WFP has also benefitted children in 36 day-care centres, 21 primary schools and 43 schools where children are given a meal.

In the city of Holguín, Lídice Isabel García Torres, Deputy Principal of Juana de la Torre day care centre, said that, “WFP’s assistance has been of great help in feeding the children whilst respecting the nutritional norms for the age group. It also helped us offer a more varied diet.”

Elizabeth Arias, Director for Food Services in Guantánamo, noted that WFP’s support also reached the beneficiaries of the Family Care System. This is a Government-run programme to provide low income families or people with disabilities with a supplement to the basic monthly allowance received through the ration book.
Pregnant women in the Guantánamo provincial maternity home benefitted from food aid.

Javier Bruzón Rojas is the manager of La Guantanamera in Holguín, a facility which provides services to 735 people entitled to receive subsidised meals. He said, “ever since we started to receive WFP foods, we have been able to prepare a larger number of bean dishes, which are very popular. Since we have been able to use more cooking oil in preparing the food, the meals have improved. Since the food was delivered, we have been able to plan meals up to 40 days ahead.”

With funding from the Italian Republic, WFP has also been providing assistance for the rehabilitation of Santiago de Cuba port which is the most important port in the eastern part of Cuba. Hurricane Sandy damaged four warehouses (two of which were totally destroyed) and the lighting
system at the Container Terminal which is extremely important from a security perspective and for handling of cargo at night.

Alipio Echevarría, Deputy Director of the Port in Santiago, said, “We were left with only 50% of our warehousing capacity at a time when it was of utmost importance for the province, and to the entire eastern region given that a large proportion of the aid was arriving through here. The five temporary storage facilities donated by WFP were therefore of great help as they allowed us to protect and receive nearly 1,500 metric tons of food that were arriving as part of the humanitarian effort”.

At a later stage, roofing sheets and fixtures for the lighting system were purchased. Laura Melo, the WFP Representative in Cuba said, “This contributes to providing food aid to the most vulnerable groups. In an emergency situation of this kind, the food itself is as important as being able to receive it. In this case, the port of Santiago was processing a large proportion of the aid, not only for the province but also for the entire region.”

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) received CERF funding and prioritised the rehabilitation of productive capacity in the agricultural sector. FAO distributed seeds and metal silos, tools (wheelbarrows, baskets, rakes, hoes, machetes, gloves), plastic meshing, water tanks and hosepipes.

Hurricane Sandy caused extensive damage to the agricultural sector in Santiago de Cuba. According to Juan Carlos Marín Arias, Deputy Delegate for Agriculture in the province, roofs were damaged at facilities for rearing Four warehouses were damaged at Santiago de Cuba port, the most important port in the Eastern region.

The five temporary storage facilities donated by WFP allowed the reception and protection of around 1,500 metric tonnes of food which arrived in Santiago de Cuba as part of the aid effort.
poultry, pigs, cattle and small livestock. All the crops that were almost ready for harvesting were lost, as well as a large number of the houses belonging to people working in the agricultural sector in that area. “But, after the hurricane, people went back to work and put their own problems aside so as to work for the common good and recover whatever was possible,” he said.

Theodor Friedrich, FAO Representative in Cuba, pointed out that “the tools donated to the farmers had an immediate impact as they were able to resume their farming activities.”

The Deputy Delegate for Agriculture in Santiago de Cuba said, “The water storage tanks were also very helpful in controlling the outbreak of diarrheic diseases in the province.” He also underlined the importance of the metal silos: “Santiago de Cuba is currently the country’s largest producer of grain and the silos help us store seed ready for planting. The project focused on the areas with high production levels such as Contramaestre, Palma, San Luis and La Maya.”

Daniel Benítez, Vice-President of Ernesto Che Guevara Credit and Service Cooperative (CSC) in Palma Soriano, said that the hurricane destroyed 95% of the farmers’ maize, bean, cassava and plantain crops and many of their houses. His cooperative received two silos, for which he is thankful saying that they could now guarantee seeds for planting in spring.

The Deputy Delegate for Agriculture in Santiago de Cuba said, “We are conducting a survey prior to distributing the hosepipes. They will be used to set up irrigation systems and to repair leaks in existing ones that have worn out after years of use. We have put the 500 kg of seeds that we received into cold storage ready for the next planting season.”

The FAO Representative explained that, “These seeds were provided to replace the country’s seed stocks that were distributed in response to the emergency. Another important aspect to promoting resilience has been the supply of metallic silos since part of the problem was that the grains stored in the area were destroyed”.

FAO considers that the hosepipes for irrigation systems and metal silos are part of the agency’s added value with regard to the assistance provided to the affected provinces as these inputs are used to mitigate problems caused by droughts.
UNDP also provided agricultural inputs and tools for the recovery and renewal of fruit plantations, livestock facilities and the planting of short-cycle crops in 80 cooperatives of Guantánamo province with funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID). In Santiago de Cuba funding was received from Pavia Municipality (Italy) and PALMA (Support Programme for the Modernisation of Local Agriculture).
SHELTER AND RECOVERY

In this sector, the United Nations aimed to create basic habitability conditions for the families who had lost their roofs; facilitate the recovery of physical infrastructure for the delivery of basic social services; strengthen the technical capacity of the institutions involved in risk analysis; produce construction materials locally; and implement sustainable housing solutions.

As part of the initial emergency response that was funded by CERF, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) distributed tarpaulins, roofing sheets, roofing tool kits, and kitchen sets. Approximately 65,000 people benefitted in Santiago de Cuba. Also during the early relief stage, UNDP used its own funds to provide hygiene kits, kitchen sets and roofing sheets to people affected in Holguín province.

Claudio Tomasi, UNDP Deputy Permanent Representative in Cuba, said, “We made large-scale purchases to replace people’s roofs and those of social institutions and centres. Initially we distributed emergency roofing (tarpaulins); but then, with funding from the European Union and with a view to improving the population’s resilience, we purchased roof modules. These comprised a zinc sheet and a roof structure that increased resistance to other hurricanes and avoided repeating the vulnerability of the previous roof type.”

Ramón Vicet Estrada, who lives in Manzana Fiol, an informal settlement in Palma Soriano, says that still cannot forget that night. “It sounded as if the wind was grinding up the roofs.” His neighbour, María Eulalia Fernández Figueredo said, “Nine of us squashed into in a bathroom and every now and then we would look outside to see what was happening and we could see how the wind was stripping off the roofing sheets”. Both of them agreed that the roofing work was very good. “This time, the repairs were really worthwhile”, says Vicet.

“Nearly 63% of homes in Palma Soriano were damaged by Hurricane Sandy out of a housing stock that already showed a large degree of deterioration,” says Israel Lahera, President of the Public Administration Council in that municipality of Santiago de Cuba province.
“It was widespread disaster. Luckily, the aid started to arrive immediately. We have received a lot – kitchen sets, plastic water storage tanks and, above all, the roofs. We are very grateful. This was the demonstration house that was used to teach the community members and construction brigades how to assemble the anchor plates and the roofs. Take a look at the new roof, we think that if another Sandy came it would hold,” says Teresa Pérez Tormo who lives in Palma Soriano.

“UNDP, UNICEF, UN-HABITAT and OXFAM came to the area right at the beginning. The work was done in a very integrated manner, although each organisation has its own specific remit. It was not just a matter of assembling a roof, we had support in the form of roofing tool kits that were very useful for the assembly process, training sessions, water storage tanks and chlorine tablets donated by UNICEF, all of which were very timely. Between the local government, the National Housing Institute and international assistance, we managed to organise the recovery phase."

Thanks to funding from the European Community Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), UNDP implemented an integrated project in Palma Soriano municipality. 8,340 families benefitted from roofs, tanks and plastic containers for water storage, kitchen sets, roofing tools and chlorine tablets. Workshops were also held and educational materials on hygiene published.

Lahera underlines the teamwork which also involved UNICEF and UN-HABITAT. “There was mutual understanding. We discussed what was most important to us with the donors. That is how we managed to distribute the aid provided by all the agencies across the 21 People’s Councils in the municipality.”

“Based on our experience, the National Housing Institute suggested that we become a pilot municipality in Santiago de Cuba for the Urban Consultation initiative, a very important tool for local authorities, and in which Santiago de Cuba as a province had lagged behind. We held workshops, had the support of UN-HABITAT and have managed to launch the city’s Urban Profile.”
Cooperation in the wake of Hurricane Sandy

The President of the Public Administration Council in Palma Soriano said that the training sessions were also very important. “We had support from UN-HABITAT, which coordinated the sessions in such a way that we could even share the documentation prepared with OXFAM for the assembly of roofs with UNDP, thereby achieving synergy between all projects. A workshop was also done on the prevention of acute diarrheic diseases; we trained brigades and identified monitoring staff on the ground capable of disseminating the knowledge learnt at the workshops. The Agenda 21 office in Holguín was very helpful. They had already implemented a similar project in the city of Holguín.”

Jorge Ordóñez Feria, the Urban Development Specialist from the Palma Soriano Physical Planning Division explained the study looked at the state of the housing stock, public services and public spaces, taking into account water supply, solid waste disposal and environmental sanitation.

“The consultation gave us the opportunity to achieve a more participatory plan because it was not just prepared from an institutional perspective. The population participated, the people for whom the plan is really being developed. I think that opportunities arise from crises. And this one, caused by the hurricane, enabled us to carry out the Urban Consultation process.”

The President of the Public Administration Council in Palma Soriano emphasised that, “All this has put the municipality in a very good position, firstly because it has allowed us to resolve a large number of problems caused by Sandy, but also because we have developed new areas for cooperation.”

UNDP implemented the response funded by OCHA, the Kingdom of Norway, the Republic of Chile, the Republic of Colombia and decentralized cooperation (Milan, Pavia, Lodi and the NGO “Saber”). This included the procurement and delivery of a large number of roofing sheets, water/sanitary and electrical installations, protective work gear, solid waste containers, and the running of awareness raising campaigns in the most badly affected municipalities of Santiago de Cuba province.

Isabel Garcia Soto who lives near Céspedes Park in the centre of Santiago, said that she was grateful that she and her children benefitted from one of the UNDP projects implemented in conjunction with Office of the Curator of the City. The hurricane force winds ripped the roof and the doors off her house which is at 407 Corona Street, between San Francisco and San Germán.

Maria Teresa Ramírez lives nearby with ten other members of her family. Three of them are over 60 and three are children. They also benefitted from this project. Although she is 65, she is optimistic about life’s challenges. “Thanks to the help we have received we are no longer in a situation of hardship. We have not recovered everything, but I know that there are a lot more people in need. There is still so much to do, but we will pull through.”

UNDP benefitted a total of 3,866 families in 21 of the 29 People’s Councils in Santiago de Cuba municipality.

Despite the Cuban Government and the international community’s efforts, it has not been possible to repair all the damage caused by Hurricane Sandy in the housing sector. The MINCEx Representative in Cuba’s eastern region stated that, “We are continuing to work hard towards recovery but housing is still the main concern and the biggest focus for the Government. What else do we need? Roofs, roofs and more roofs.”

ECHO’s disaster preparedness programme, DIPECHO, also provided support to re-establish the meteorological early warning system in Santiago de Cuba.

UNDP funds were also used to build the capacity of key institutions, such as the National Office for Statistics and Information (ONEI) and the Risk Reduction Management Centres (RRMC), with the aim of addressing the challenges of recovery and promoting risk reduction in Santiago de Cuba municipality.
Martha Roque Bandera, aged 61, is grateful for the new roof she received through the United Nations aid.
Cooperation in the wake of Hurricane Sandy

Idalia Izaguirre Rodriguez, her family and her mother Martha Rodriguez live in El Brujo, in Siboney. They were evacuated to their neighbour’s house and from there they watched the wind rip the roof off their house. Today, she can smile again and is grateful for the new roof received from UNDP.

Maria Luisa Bueno, the MINCEx Representative in Cuba’s eastern region, said, “Roofs are still the biggest challenge, it has been a priority for UNDP assistance which has had an impact in Palma Soriano and Santiago de Cuba municipality. More than half a million roofing sheets have arrived. It is not a total solution to the problem, but it is an important response. Support from UN-HABITAT has also been important.”

Idalia Izaguirre Rodriguez, her family and her mother Martha Rodriguez live in El Brujo, in Siboney. They were evacuated to their neighbour’s house and from there they watched the wind rip the roof off their house. Today, she can smile again and is grateful for the new roof received from UNDP.
Sonia Juez Torres, ONEI Deputy Delegate in Santiago de Cuba, drew attention to the water infiltrations that Sandy caused in their offices, damaging computer equipment and furniture. “Here, we handle all the information on the province which is assessed by the authorities. When the information was received we did not have any electricity or computers. We had to use calculators to process the information so as to report on the magnitude of the losses. The equipment supplied by the United Nations has been very important.”

Luis Ibáñez, Provincial Director of the Risk Reduction Management Centre (RRMC) in Santiago de Cuba, said, “The generators installed at each Centre and Early Warning Point by the UNDP-sponsored project in Cuba were very important in restoring power, thus facilitating the work of the disaster command centres at the municipal Defence Councils. It allowed radio and TV to stations to remain on air, providing advice to the population and broadcasting information from the Municipal Defence and Provincial Defence Councils. The communication systems at the 40 Early Warning Points and at each of the municipal and provincial Risk Reduction Management Centres were vital to keeping information flowing about the trajectory and the impact of the hurricane. They also facilitated work during the recovery process.”

The neighbouring province of Holguín also found the RRMCs very helpful. According to its provincial director, Ismael Columbié, “The generators provided power to the Government computer systems, the media, the command centres and the communication system that links all Early Warning Points and the municipal Management Centres. We were able to charge mobile phones, radio batteries and even keep food in fridges for vulnerable and evacuated people.”

Columbié considers that another strength of the RRMCs that was demonstrated during Hurricane Sandy was the possibility of “communicating with neighbouring provinces, including nearby countries that had already been hit by Hurricane Sandy. They gave us information about its possible course. The loudspeakers and the media helped a lot during the evacuation exercise.”

With funds from Swiss Development Cooperation (COSUDE), UN-HABITAT purchased equipment for the local production of building materials and the Agenda 21 Office in Holguín. Marilyn Fernáñez, National Coordinator for UN-HABITAT Programmes in Cuba, noted that this funding also covered the construction of 30 prefabricated houses for people in precarious living conditions in Palma Soriano, Santiago de Cuba province (20 units), and in Mayarí, Holguín province (10 units).

As part of the assistance, UN-HABITAT is also building technical and community-based capacity in Holguín and Santiago de Cuba provinces. In Palma Soriano municipality technical training was given on themes such as urban reconstruction, risk assessment and how to update a Land Use Plan using a risk reduction approach.

Two pilot initiatives on water and sanitation have been initiated in Dos Palmas with community participation. One is the provision of water filters that can be made locally, and the other is the construction of an ecological sanitation unit.
Cooperation in the wake of Hurricane Sandy

Marielena Martes Rodríguez, RRMc Director, and Juan Heredia López, Head of Civil Defence at Tercer Frente municipality, during a radio exchange with one of the Early Warning Points in the municipality.
Dr. Juan Bruno Zayas General Hospital suffered structural damage during Sandy.
In this sector, the aid effort prioritised re-establishing health care services in hospitals and health centres, in particular those for children, adolescents, pregnant women and other vulnerable groups. Cooperation has also focused on restoring reproductive health services in the hurricane-stricken areas and reducing the incidence of diseases linked to the hygiene and sanitation problems that resulted from the contamination of the water supply. Health facilities in the three provinces affected by the hurricane benefitted from such assistance.

The Pan-American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) used its own funds and funds from CERF to procure and distribute 2 million doxycycline tablets to treat acute diarrheic diseases. CERF funding also procured equipment, reagents and glassware for diagnostic laboratories; chlorine level indicators; microscopes, spectrophotometers and autoclaves; containers and vacuum flasks for transporting samples; medical examination gloves, disposable clothing and furniture for hospitals.

Dr. Iván Sergio Reyes, Deputy Director of Juan Bruno Zayas General Hospital in Santiago de Cuba, said that the area’s epidemiological status in the wake of Sandy was still very complicated due to diarrheic diseases and respiratory infections.

Dr. Nelson Cabrera Ortiz, Health Director in Contramaestre Municipality, Santiago de Cuba, said that Sandy damaged 27 health facilities in the area. There were outbreaks of acute diarrheic diseases. “There are communities which do not have piped water so we gave people water purification tablets as a water treatment measure. We also received autoclaves to sterilise surgical instruments. Three have been located in remote mountain communities in order to improve healthcare services in those places. Microscopes and other laboratory equipment were also delivered. The aid was very important because at that time the country could not secure all those resources.”

Dr. Osvaldo Cruz Salcedo, Health Director in Palma Soriano Municipality, said, “The assistance was of great help, especially the rapid testing kits as we are unable to secure a steady supply of them. They helped us detect cases and possible causes of acute diarrheic diseases. 100,000 water purification tablets were distributed to all the affected
areas which meant that after a month and a half, the number of cases fell and reduced the epidemic threat level. People were also educated on the benefits of water purification and treatment for greater health safety.

In Guantánamo, 105 public health facilities were damaged to include the General Teaching Hospital, the Psychiatric Hospital and the Children’s Hospital. Juana Brook Ribeaux, Civil Defence Specialist from the Provincial Health Division, said that “all the equipment and the various donations received were of great assistance”.

Dr. José Luis Di Fabio, PAHO/WHO Representative in Cuba, said that the delivery of the water purification tablets and the dosimeters used to measure water quality were very timely given the problems of water supply contamination and the outbreak of acute diarrheic diseases.

In addition, funds provided by the Russian Federation were used to procure incubators, anaesthesia equipment and monitors for Lucía Íñiguez Hospital and Vladimir Ilich Lenin Hospital in Holguín province. The funding is also being used to provide new medical and clinical laboratory equipment to health centres in the affected provinces, and enhance the Regional Referral Laboratory in Manzanillo, Granma, which covers all the provinces in eastern Cuba.

The PAHO/WHO Representative in the country said that a positive outcome of the work carried out in the aftermath Hurricane Sandy has been that every hospital and health clinic in the country has been inventoried and its basic needs identified. The exercise has allowed the aid to be directed towards the health centres in the eastern provinces hardest hit by the hurricane. “Now, with this survey, we know where they are and what their requirements are. This information allows us to be better prepared and respond rapidly.”

PAHO/WHO was also responsible for the donation received from Global Links, a US organisation that provided equipment in kind to re-establish the healthcare sector, including disposable gloves, disinfectant wipes, face masks, bed linen, disposable thermometers, soap, kits for health workers, infusion stands, surgical instruments, hospital beds with mattresses and furniture.

UNFPA also provided assistance in the health sector, restoring and revitalising the emergency reproductive health services in these provinces. Using its own funds and CERF funding, UNFPA provided 19 health facilities in Santiago de Cuba, Holguín and Guantánamo with reproductive health kits containing equipment for carrying out surgical interventions and caesarean sections on high risk patients in maternity wards. These kits strengthened the local capacity in maternity wards for deliveries, obstetric care and neonatal care.

Dr. Orlando Parellada Joa, Director of the Dra. Heli Irma Delfín Ripio Obstetrics and Gynaecology Hospital in Palma Soriano, said that nearly the whole municipality was affected. “As we are a long way from the most advanced units, we have to take on a larger number of patients. Although the facility’s infrastructure was not badly damaged, we faced problems arising from the lack of resources for such a high intake of patients. Therefore, the assistance provided to us was extremely important.”

“These kits allow efficient reproductive health care provision as they contain good quality, synthetic, absorbing,
double-gauge sutures with which you can do practically everything. The drugs, ciprofloxacin and doxycycline, were also very useful in the epidemiological context in which we were working.”

Health specialists from institutions located in the three provinces that benefitted from the surgical instruments all concurred on the high quality of the equipment received.

Dr. Pedro Montes de Oca Santiago, Obstetrician/Gynaecologist and Deputy Director of Juan Bruno Zayas Children’s and Maternity Hospital in Santiago de Cuba explained that, “We have the province’s largest unit with 160 beds. We look after high-risk pregnant women from 17 referral centres in the area, conditions related to pregnancy and low-weight babies (under 1,500 grams). Now, we have top of the range equipment. Thanks to this assistance, we have three new trays of general equipment for complicated operations. The consumable items were also very useful. In fact, we haven’t had any more infectious outbreaks in connection with healthcare services. And ever since these kits arrived, our fatality level has stood at zero.”

Vladimir Ilich Lenin Hospital, in Holguín province, was another health facility that benefitted from reproductive health kits. The hospital deals with 35-40 deliveries each day and over 7,500 each year. It is Cuba’s largest maternity hospital and therefore has the largest number of high-risk deliveries and low-weight children in the country. Dr. Eucín Regis Angulo, Deputy Director of a Children’s and Maternity services, said, “These kits contain high-quality equipment that arrived just at the right time”.

Dr. Pedro Montes de Oca Santiago, Obstetrician/Gynaecologist and Deputy Director of Juan Bruno Zayas Children’s and Maternity Hospital in Santiago de Cuba, spoke highly of the surgical instruments donated by UNFPA.
In Guantánamo, Dr. Plácido de la Rosa Blanco, Deputy Director for Maternity Services at Agostinho Neto Hospital, confirms, “The drugs contained in the kits were very useful in treating postpartum women who needed antibiotics as we could use them more extensively and provide better treatment. Also, we have limited consumable materials - disposable syringes, surgical tape - so the assistance was very welcome. It particularly helped us during caesarean sections, which is the most important type of obstetric surgery. And a large number of our deliveries are by caesarean section.”

The Obstetric surgeon said that the set of surgical equipment, and the vascular clamps in particular were also very important. “Our medical staff is more confident now. We have managed to decrease the infant mortality rate considerably, and we are
now working on lowering maternal morbidity and mortality. The surgical equipment is helping us do that. The training given on the care of critically ill pregnant women was also very important and we replicated it across all health centres.”

Rolando García, Assistant Representative of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) added that three training workshops were held in close coordination with the senior management of the Mother and Child Healthcare Programme (PAMI), the local authorities and the local health care system. Managers, doctors and other healthcare staff from the 19 centres that received the kits attended the workshops. A national level workshop was subsequently held in Ciego de Ávila province, where training could be replicated to other parts of the country.
UNICEF was responsible for managing and coordinating United Nations assistance in this sector through funding from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). It included the distribution of educational materials, teaching aids for teachers and recreational equipment for schools, with the aim of ensuring that children could continue the school year in a safe environment.

Begoña Arellano, Acting UNICEF Representative in Cuba, stresses that from the initial stage of the emergency, “the Cuban Government made a huge effort to ensure that children went back to school as fast as possible. Its involvement in distributing the aid was essential and was done by the provincial delegations of the Ministry of Education and the local authorities. They gave us the information we needed about their requirements in order to rebuild the schools and secure educational and recreational materials for nearly 250,000 children in Guantánamo, Santiago de Cuba and Holguín provinces.

This contributed to a faster and better psycho-social recovery for the children, helping them return to normality as fast as possible.”

The director of Meñique Day Care Centre in Guantánamo was grateful for the children’s recreational equipment and the water tanks that they received. “We were given colour pencils, crayons, modelling clay, pens, puppets, dominos, jigsaw puzzles, drawing paper and sheets of card. We gave a few items to each group. It calmed the children, taking them away from all that happened.”

At Calixto García Íñiguez School in Holguín, the Director, Luis A. Obregón Serrano said, “The kits are used by children during recreation periods, and for the sports events organised at weekends. We are also planning to use them whenever the school is turned into an emergency evacuation centre for large numbers of people, to include children. The items are to be used rather than put away, and we are using them!”
Children at the Menique Day Care Centre in Guantánamo playing with some of the items in the kits delivered by UNICEF.
Zapaticos de Rosa Day Care Centre in Santiago de Cuba lost many of its doors and windows.

After repairs, the children at Zapaticos de Rosa are back to playing again.
Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Primary School in El Brujo, Siboney, was severely damaged by Hurricane Sandy. The Director, Ydelcides Castillo Cascaret explained that it is located only a few kilometres from the south coast of Santiago de Cuba province and was hit hard by the hurricane. “From October to January, lessons were taught in neighbouring houses because the school lost its roof. Now we are back to normal, but there was extensive damage in the area and nearly every child attending this school had a damaged home.”

UNICEF’s primary concern in Santiago de Cuba province has been the rapid recovery of school buildings to include replacing roofs and repairing other structural damage. This was done with the funds donated by the Kingdom of Sweden and the Russian Federation. A total of 227 schools are being repaired in several municipalities of Santiago de Cuba (San Luis, II Frente, Songo-La Maya, Santiago de Cuba and Palma Soriano).

Jesús Leyva Pupo, the Ministry of Education’s Provincial Coordinator for Projects and Donations said that 960 schools were either partially or totally damaged in the province. The initial solution was to transfer students to other government buildings so they could continue the school year. In addition, families offered their homes for use as classrooms. Within 10 to 15 days of the hurricane, students were already back at school.

Leyva said, “That was the beginning of the large scale support provided by many donor countries and the United Nations, particularly UNICEF, WFP and UNDP.”
in the case of the roofs. UNICEF’s recreation kits were handed out to every primary school, special needs school and day care centre and had a very positive impact. The kits containing school materials were also very useful for teaching activities and students’ development.

Subsequently, UNICEF continued to work in Santiago de Cuba and with Swedish funding provided assistance to 113 schools. This included zinc roofing sheets, roofing tools and items to repair the electricity supply (light switches, plugs, lights, wiring). Although all the work is not complete, most of the classrooms are already in use. Now, with funding from Russia, we are working on another 114. That means that all the schools in Santiago de Cuba will have been repaired.”

Odalys Aguilera Silega, Director of Ninive Dross Bataille Primary School in Santiago de Cuba, explained that, “Sandy destroyed roofs and walls, and damaged furniture, computers and televisions. We could not continue to use the school as it risked collapsing. We worked in a space that a textile factory lent us. The damage was so bad that the 354 students were only able to return to the school buildings in September and October 2013, a year after Hurricane Sandy.”

She said, “The aid enabled us to repair and paint both school buildings. A new roof was put on, the walls were repaired and electrical fittings installed. In addition we received school kits which were very necessary at the time, and we are still using them.”
As a result of the response to Hurricane Sandy, the heads of United Nations System (SNU) agencies and the local authorities reflected on what had worked well and what could be improved in the future.

It was noted that a large number of people and families had benefitted directly from the response. Other successes were the rapid and effective coordination of the aid mobilised within the UNS; cooperation between the agencies and the national, provincial and local authorities; and a good synergy between the different UNS agencies.

The exercise noted other positive aspects, namely the contribution made by the Situation Reports (SitRep) in providing information to United Nations and the international community about the extent of the damage; the training provided alongside the delivery of aid; the initiative to rebuild using locally produced materials; the repairs to infrastructure that facilitated the delivery of aid and the level of coordination achieved with the local counterparts in identifying needs and implementing the aid package.

Laura Melo, WFP Representative in Cuba, said that WFP as the agency responsible for coordinating the United Nations Emergency Technical Team (UNETE) cooperated with Civil Defence, MINCEX and other institutions directly involved in providing a response. “We are now engaged in a more active joint consultation process, not only in relation to capacity building, but also to discuss establishing concrete response mechanisms and the steps to activate them. To achieve this we have already held a workshop on logistics with national counterparts, and the work in this area will continue.”

“From a development perspective, it is important to have well-established mechanisms so as to be able to activate a rapid response to any situation. For example, the possibility of creating mechanisms to pre-position supplies is being discussed with national counterparts in order to provide a timely response.”

The United Nations has not only provided material assistance to the provinces damaged by Sandy. During 2013, three workshops were held. The first analysed lessons
In June 2013 a workshop took place to analyse the work carried out by the United Nations System agencies and the Cuban Government organizations and institutions during the response to Hurricane Sandy.

The United Nations in Cuba

learnt from the hurricane and the second aimed to improve the country’s coordination mechanisms for assistance in the event of disasters. The third, the International Workshop on Risk in Cities: Sharing Tools for Urban Resilience was held in Santiago de Cuba.

This three day workshop brought together Ministry officials, staff from the provincial and local authorities, donor countries, NGOs, UNS agencies in Cuba and international cooperation partners, along with experts from Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico, Haiti and Indonesia. They exchanged strategies and experiences on strengthening urban resilience, using the recent recovery effort in the city of Santiago de Cuba following Sandy in October 2012 as a basis for discussion.

The Civil Defence Chief of Staff said of the importance of the training sessions, “Workshops are ways of disseminating
experiences and are very useful because a range of topics are discussed. You exchange views with decision-makers at all levels, with different groups within the population, and with municipal leaders. It is very important that all these activities are implemented at grassroots level, at community level, at the level of People’s Councils, because those are the people who are directly impacted by the needs and the problems; and that is where we most need knowledge.”


FAO Cuba facilitated international meetings to share Cuba’s experience in natural disaster and risk management, and to share best practice in disaster response in the

Specialists from a range of national and international institutions exchanged experiences during the three day “International Workshop on Risk in Cities: Sharing Tools for Urban Resilience” in Santiago de Cuba.
The United Nations in Cuba

The United Nations in Cuba

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The capacity of surveillance services and laboratories connected to occupational health were also strengthened, as was the Network for the Promotion of Healthy Housing. PAHO/WHO was also involved with the ‘safe hospital initiative’, including mid- and low-complexity health facilities and assessments were done using the hospital safety index in the Isla de la Juventud, Cienfuegos, Santiago de Cuba and Manzanillo. PAHO/WHO also funded a project to improve safety measures at Héroes de Baire Hospital in the Isla de la Juventud.

Over the last five years, UNDP Cuba has been working with the Government and key stakeholders at local level to strengthen management capacities for disaster risk reduction, as well as in the development-oriented post-disaster early recovery processes.

It has also encouraged the systematisation of lessons learnt and best practices, as well as a dialogue on how to enhance resilience in key sectors of national development, in line with the priorities identified in the country’s Socio-Economic Policy Guidelines.

UNDP has promoted South-South cooperation initiatives, allowing participants to share their knowledge in key areas for risk reduction management. It has also allowed the replication of Cuba’s experiences, such RRMCSs, in other parts of the region.

Partnerships have been fostered with key national stakeholders and integrated projects have been implemented at a provincial level. As part of this work, RRMCSs have become a formal part of local government structures and institutional agreements have been drawn up to link the

agricultural sector. FAO has also supported actions to rebuild capacity in fish production, livestock rearing and urban/suburban agriculture all of which were affected by the 2008 and 2012 hurricanes. It has also built capacity to increase resilience within these sectors and amongst institutions to help cope with future events.

PAHO/WHO supported the strengthening of the early warning systems through providing information, advisory services, literature and reports on public health events that were of national and international importance. Laboratory diagnosis also improved, and training was provided on environmental risk management and the assessment of such risks in population groups residing in vulnerable areas.

UNESCO in Cuba has strengthened the capacity of the educational institutions that are part of its network of schools.
Early Warning Systems to local governments through the RRMCs.

UNDP has also supported resilience actions in the agricultural sector to ensure the inclusion of livelihoods protection measures in the Risk Reduction Plans, and in the local production of building materials to establish sustainable mechanisms for housing recovery.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Cuba has strengthened the education sector’s capacity in disaster risk reduction. This has been done through the educational institutions that are part of UNESCO’s school network which covers all Cuba’s provinces.

It has also promoted the systematization of lessons learnt and best practices, the dialogue on how to increase resilience through education and South-South cooperation initiatives. This has allowed knowledge sharing in key educational areas for risk reduction.

Furthermore, UNESCO has worked to strengthen the capacity of communications professionals to provide effective media coverage in a period before a hurricane. This resulted in the publication of a book called “A mal tiempo, periodismo” about the media coverage of hurricanes in Cuba.

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) provided support for capacity building in disaster risk reduction in schools located in vulnerable areas of the country. Lessons learnt, good practice and knowledge management were systematised so as to increase the level of resilience in schools, families and communities.

UNICEF also contributed to the establishment and enhancement of the Early Warning System and the RRMCs. It has also promoted South-South cooperation initiatives by facilitating the involvement of Cuban specialists in exchanges to discuss key issues for risk reduction management and environmental education.

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) organised courses for key local stakeholders and local groups in order to strengthen their capacity to manage risk reduction.

This agency also identified and promoted good practices in sustainable housing and habitat management using a risk reduction approach, and has been involved in several inter-agency projects to support housing recovery after the 2008 and 2012 hurricanes.

Over the last few years, UN-HABITAT Cuba has encouraged the updating of urban and rural land use plans including a risk identification approach; has promoted a broader culture of urban resilience at local government level; and facilitated increased citizens’ participation in post-disaster housing recovery.

All this work has been implemented by the United Nations System in Cuba with the aim of accompanying the country in its efforts to strengthen national and local capacities for the comprehensive management of risk reduction. It focuses on working at a local level and in the most vulnerable areas of the country.

The cooperation between the United Nations and Cuba is part of our shared history. We will continue to work together for the benefit of the Cuban people.