

## **PART 2: RELATIONSHIPS OF ACTIVITIES REGARDING VULNERABILITY REDUCTION TO NATURAL HAZARDS OF THE CENTRAL AMERICAN TRANSPORTATION SECTOR**

The impact of natural hazards in Central America such as Hurricane Mitch has negatively affected the different sectors of the region, including highway transportation and its infrastructure. These natural hazards have created incentives for the USDE and other national and regional institutions to prepare steps to reduce the vulnerability specifically of the highway transportation sector to natural hazards.

Given the economic and social importance on a regional level of having a safe and secure transportation infrastructure, and to enforce the subject of vulnerability reduction to natural hazards, USDE has promoted the efforts of regional organizations such as SIECA, COMITRAN, COCATRAM and CEPREDENAC to include vulnerability reduction in projects related to the highway transportation sector.

Among the recent USDE activities related to vulnerability reduction in the transportation sector is the OAS-USDOT Transportation Vulnerability Reduction Project for Central America, which consists of three components:

1. General Study on Vulnerability Reduction of Road Segments to Natural Hazards on the Pan American Highway and its Complementary Corridors in Central America
2. Mechanisms for Mutual Assistance in Case of Damage and Vulnerability Reduction of Transportation Infrastructure in Central America
3. Training on the Use of Information on Natural Hazards for the Formulation and Evaluation of Investment Projects in the Highway Transportation Sector

This document is part of the first component of the OAS-USDOT project and has as its objective to serve as a technical guide to the planning directorates of the ministries of transportation in the region and/or regional or international organizations that are developing or executing projects related to the highway transportation sector.

The objective of this chapter is to identify the products of each of the components of the OAS-USDOT project, and to associate these with the products of the regional institutions SIECA and CEPREDENAC, since they are directly linked to products of the OAS-USDOT project. With this USDE intends for the regional organizations previously mentioned, as well as other organizations interested in the subject, to be able to identify in an efficient way, the usefulness of the information presented by all projects.

On the international level, it is understood that due to the impact caused by Hurricane Mitch on the regional economic and social level, the international community started on a series of efforts to attend to emergency and rehabilitation needs. On December 10, 1998, in Washington DC, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) called a meeting to determine the rehabilitation and reconstruction international cooperation needs. In order to tackle the subjects of reconstruction and vulnerability reduction at the same time, another meeting of the Consultative Group for the Transformation and Reconstruction of Central America was held in Stockholm, Sweden on May 25-28, 1999, which was also called for by the IDB.

During this meeting the governments of Central America countries and the international community decided to share responsibility of the reconstruction and transformation of the affected countries, starting a long-term association guided by priorities as defined by the Central American countries and based on the following principles and objectives (Stockholm Declaration, 1999):

1. To reduce the ecological and social vulnerability of the region, as the main objective.
2. Rebuild and transform Central America based on an integrated approach with transparency and governability.
3. To consolidate democracy and governability, enforcing the de-centralization of government functions and its span of responsibility, with the active participation of the civilian population.
4. To promote the respect of human rights as a permanent objective. The promotion of equal rights regardless of gender, ethnic group or minority and the rights of children must be a priority.
5. To coordinate the efforts of donors, guided by the priorities established by the countries receiving the aid.
6. To intensify efforts to reduce the foreign debt of the countries in the region.

In addition to the national efforts for reconstruction that are supported by the international community, the presidents of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the First Vice President of Panama, accompanied by the Vice Prime Minister of Belize and the Vice President of the Dominican Republic serving as observers, held the 20<sup>th</sup> Presidential Summit from October 18-19, 1999 in Guatemala City, Guatemala. In this summit they started a regional effort and focused the subjects on the improvement of the quality of life of the inhabitants of the region and the creation of new development opportunities. With this they created the Declaration of Guatemala II, in which they mentioned the following issue among others (Declaration of Guatemala, Guatemala City, October 19, 1999):

The devastating consequences of the different natural phenomena that have affected this region have made more evident its

vulnerability, and placed under risk the unique richness of Central America's bio-diversity, which represents 10% of the world's total.

With this Declaration the Presidents agreed on specific actions that focused on the vulnerability reduction of natural disasters in all social and economic sectors. The specific actions are as follows:

- To adopt the Strategic Framework for the Reduction of Vulnerability and Disaster in Central American, which is part of the region's transformation and sustainable development process for the next millennium, and that includes the basic guidelines on prevention measures and damage control, as well as readiness and emergency prevention measures, giving special attention to the most vulnerable groups and sections of society, especially on the levels of poverty and marginality focused on gender. The Strategic Framework, which is an integral part of this Declaration, is the gauge for the elaboration, actualization, habilitation, and development of regional plans on the subject of the Reduction of Vulnerability and Disasters, Integrated Management and Preservation of Water Resources, and Prevention and Control of Forest Fires.
- To establish the Five-Year Central American Project for the Reduction of Disaster Vulnerability and Impact 2000-2004, during which efforts will have to concentrate on the transformation and search for sustainable development in our societies, for which the extra aid by the international community is desired. To assign CEPREDENAC to coordinate this five-year effort.
- To instruct the Council of Ministers of External Relations and the Council of Ministers in general and other corresponding sector groups, so that with the aid of the General Secretariat of SICA and in alliance with the specialized regional institutions will complete and maintain a close following of the developments of the Strategic Framework.
- To instruct the Central American Security Commission so that it will, in alliance with the respective national authorities, establish in the shortest time frame possible the joint action mechanisms, and that these mechanisms be transparent and share in the region's risk prevention and disaster mitigation, with the help of the corresponding regional institutions.
- To assign, according to the possibilities of each country, the internal financial resources needed for such initiatives; to emphasize the call to the cooperating international community so they it contributes in its effort to reduce the level of vulnerability in case of disasters in the region. And to instruct the Council of Ministers of External Relations to, with the aid of the General Secretariat of SICA, coordinate the management of international technical and financial international resources that are required for the completion of these projects on a regional level, while the respective government agencies will do the same on a national level.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> Presidential Summit the Presidents also analyzed the possibility of having a new meeting of the Regional Consultative Group in Madrid,

Spain, to examine the possibilities of cooperating to support Central America in its medium and long-term transformation and modernization.

A direct response to these mandates is the OAS-USDOT project, as well as the activities that SIECA and CEPREDENAC have performed or are performing related to the vulnerability reduction of the Central American highway transportation sector.

Figure 5, from the Spanish version of this document, presents three columns of which the first describes the products of which the OAS-USDOT project is comprised, the second presents products under SIECA's coordination and related to the vulnerability reduction of the highway transportation sector. These projects correspond to the "Master Plan for Regional Transportation for the 2001-2010 Decade" (Central American Transportation Study, ECAT), "Improved Regional Capacity to Mitigate the Effects of Transnational Disasters," and "The Transportation Sector in the Regional Plan for Disaster Reduction," and the "Central American Logistical Corridor." The third column presents the products of the Basic Plan of the Regional Plan for Disaster Reduction (PRRD) and are linked to the principal export trade corridors that are directly related to each of the three components of the OAS-USDOT project. CEPREDENAC created PRRD as one of its initiatives to establish a Central American strategy to reduce the societal impact of disasters.

As can be observed in Figure 5 the three components of the OAS-USDOT project provide useful information to the regional activities of the transportation sector. These activities are under the coordination of SIECA and CEPREDENAC given that they have in common disaster prevention and mitigation of the regional road segments in the transportation sector.