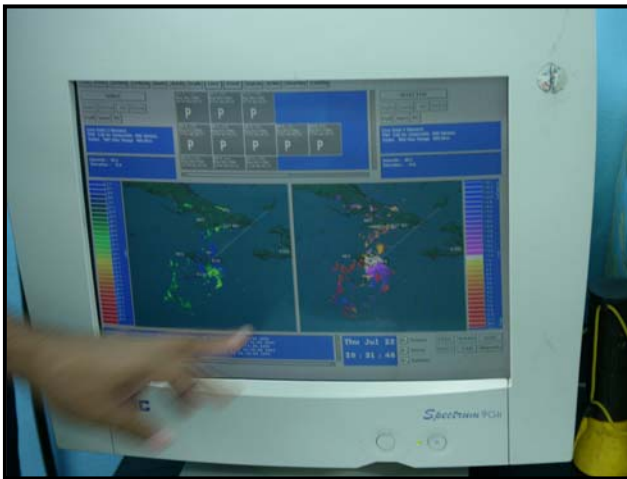




JAMAICAN RADAR DEPLOYED TO TELEVISION FOR THE FIRST TIME UNDER UNDP PROJECT

On 10th September, 2004, a category 4 Hurricane Ivan, approached Kingston, the capital city Jamaica with the deadly force of winds exceeding 140 mph. As Jamaicans of all walks prepared and prayed, the DIPECHO/BCPR sponsored “radar early warning project team” was working with members of the Jamaica met service radar department to “own the eye” of the storm when it came within radar range of Jamaica. This procedure (taking ownership of the eye) is standard practice in meteorological circles, but not-with-standing the hi-tech doppler radar situated in the hills overlooking beautiful Kingston, it had never been done before in the many meteorological events experienced since its installation in 1999.



This was simply because the equipment had always and still to some extent, suffered down-time resulting from insufficient government funds for maintenance of equipment and site. As such there was no confidence shown in its reliability and utility by other disaster agencies, including the national disaster office (ODPEM) and it was simply ignored during critical events. The “Radar early warning pilot project” being implemented through UNDP, assisted in its rehabilitation by providing filters and modems to enable a communications link to transmit images from the radar site to the met office in Kingston and a stand by

generator which was invaluable during the hurricane and which allowed tracking during the entire event. The project staff was also behind the airing of images on television during the event, which were later picked up by the US National Weather Service and aired on the cable “weather channel”. This was the first time ever that radar images from Jamaica were being used by the met officers on TV (local and US cable weather channel). In fact at one critical stage during the event, radio announcers were repeating reports from the weather channel (using their satellite pictures) that the eye was about 20 miles south east of Kingston and heading directly there. Members of the project team found this strange, as winds being experienced would not be associated with such a position. Upon calling the radar site (the telephone line sending pictures to the TV station was by then down) it was reported that the storm took a sudden and unbelievable left turn and that the eye had already by-passed Kingston to the south on a WNW track and was about 50 miles south of Spanish Town, which was more consistent with what was being felt. This information was later passed on to the public by radio that provided clarification and relief to residents of the Kingston area. The Jamaica Red Cross also reported that pilot communities used the training they received under the project very wisely and as such evacuated in an orderly and timely manner without panic. As such there was no loss of life and minimal property damage.

Project intervention was also responsible for building private-public partnerships with the met office, which is providing resources for “grounding” the radar site, to minimize lightening strikes that have been a major problem for operation of the radar to met office radio link. A presentation package of Radar images was subsequently produced and is being used at various fora and conferences to build the awareness, credibility and confidence in this latent capability.

For more information please visit:

UNDP Jamaica Country Office - <http://www.undp.org/fojam>

UNDP BCPR – Disaster Reduction Unit - <http://www.undp.org/bcpr/disred/index.htm>

