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Transcarpathia: Floods of Disaster



As most people in Ukraine prepared to welcome the onset of spring in March 2001, perhaps no one suspected the snowfall of winter would leave its mark behind in such a ferocious manner. While the snow rapidly melted, clearing the way for a bright summer - a summer that is greeted with much pomp and excitement every year by a nation rejoicing the arrival of a warmer season - the people of the Transcarpathia oblast of western Ukraine began to doubt whether they had any reason to celebrate at all. The flooding in the

Tisza River Basin, shared by Ukraine, Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania, proved to be one of the worst flooding in Central Europe in decades.

First the snow melted, then came the heavy rainfalls, and before they knew it, the Transcarpathian population was faced with severe, and even fatal, flooding that threatened to devastate their lives with rapid precision.

By 11 March 2001, 9 people had died, 942 buildings had been completely destroyed and whole communities were forced to evacuate their homes. So serious was the damage that all road and railroad connections had been cut off from some villages and the only way they were accessible was by helicopter. Destruction spread like wildfire and lack of information in several villages added to the panic.

THE DAMAGE	
◆	9 people dead
◆	11,579 people evacuate their homes
◆	942 buildings completely destroyed
◆	21,334 homes partially damaged
◆	3 bridges completely destroyed
◆	53 km of roads unsuitable for use
◆	9 km of railroads unsuitable for use

With this major disaster at hand, a joint mission of UNDP, UNICEF, and the Government of Ukraine took place to the Transcarpathia oblast from 9-11 March 2001. The mission was undertaken to get a first hand look at what had happened and what could be done to help those in need. 3 rayons, Vynohradiv, Khust, and Tiachiv were



chosen for observation as they suffered the most severe damages. Other rayons were assisted by other countries (such as Berehove was by the Government of Hungary).

UNDP's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (formerly known as ERD – Emergency Response Division) released USD 50,000 to each country (Ukraine, Hungary,

Romania), directed towards the relief activities in the affected areas. It was agreed that a portion of these funds would be used for direct and immediate humanitarian assistance while the rest of it would be used for designing a long-term response to such disasters.

Working Together: A Joint Mission

UNDP/UNICEF/Ministry of Emergencies, 9-11 March 2001.

The team was shocked on arrival by the plight of the people and the overall level of despair in the villages that were ravaged by the flooding. The mission soon realized that the village-based people had faced the most severe consequences. While acknowledging the enormous efforts and accomplishments of the local authorities and the central government of Ukraine, the mission established that much was yet to be done in delivering humanitarian assistance to civilians and to the affected territories. The following are some of their observations:

Over 20,000 rescue workers carried out rescue activities under the direction of Mr. Vasil Durdinets, Minister of Emergencies, and Mr. Grigoriy Marchenko, Deputy Minister of Emergencies.

- ◆ Several thousand people had lost their homes and were forced to reside in hotels, schools, gymnasiums, and student hostels. Others had taken refuge with relatives or had fled to neighboring countries like Hungary. 11,579 people were forced to evacuate their homes. Medical supplies such as disinfectants, anti-bacterial medicines, painkillers etc were purchased and delivered by UNDP Ukraine to the affected population of Transcarpathia.



- ◆ Homes were damaged primarily due to decomposed construction material used for walls. The construction material was made of loam and straw which, when soaked by floodwater, collapses. About 32,000 household were affected in total.
- ◆ High water in many villages destroyed food stock usually preserved in basements or cellars.
- ◆ Agriculture, the main source of life for many people in the region, suffered great losses and many vineyards were completely destroyed.
- ◆ Heavy damages to roads, railroads and communication lines were evident throughout the area. 3 bridges were completely destroyed, 5 heavily damaged, 53 km of roads and 9 km of railroads were unsuitable for use.

Transcarpathia had once before been subjected to harsh flooding in November 1998. However water levels from the floods of 2001 were substantially higher by almost a meter. The higher the water rose, the greater were the material losses.

The immediate effects of the disaster were undoubtedly caused by the lack of housing for the affected population.

Putting to use the experience of the 1998 floods, the health of the population was expected to worsen 2-3 weeks after the disaster with deteriorating immune systems and an increase in respiratory and viral infections.



Looking Ahead: Adopting a Visionary Approach

As a long term plan for managing such a crisis became obvious, it was decided that a national analysis needed to be conducted for the Tisza River Basin reflecting the cause and effect of flooding in that region.

Mr. Leonid Kuchma, President of Ukraine, visited the disaster area on 9 March 2001 and signed a Presidential Decree declaring the territory an emergency zone.

A full-fledged project needed to be developed if any hopes of preventing a humanitarian crisis for possible future flooding were to be harbored. For this, a consultant was hired to formulate a

concept paper on forestry as a guideline and basis for preventive measures to be taken in the future. Furthermore, due importance was given to the fact that for the most appropriate method to be adopted, it was necessary to involve all the relevant stakeholders to provide their input based on a common understanding of the problem and options for the future.

UNDP, RBEC, and the Carpathian Foundation met in July 2001 to highlight what the programme would entail, its goals and objectives, where assistance was most needed, and how it would be carried out. While members of governing bodies discussed several proposals, it was evident that project activities could be broken down into two sections: *Immediate Actions* and *Preventive Measures*.



Immediate Actions – to be addressed urgently

Humanitarian assistance to be directly provided to those who have lost their homes and household goods.

- **Medical Supplies:** It was obvious there was an urgent need for medical supplies.
- **Hygiene:** There was widespread need for sanitation supplies and water purification devices as lack of proper housing and sanitation increases susceptibility to illnesses.

Preventive Measures – to be implemented over a longer period of time

- **Reconstruction, long-term management**



UNDP, in partnership with UNICEF, provided assistance to two schools (in Tiachiv and Vynohradiv) affected by the floods.

UNDP prepared a Tisza River Basin Disaster Prevention Programme.



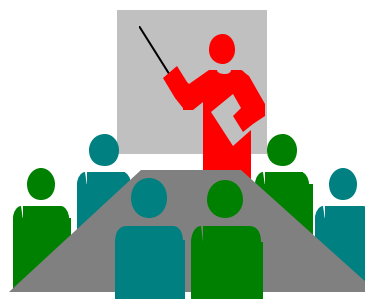
➤ Preservation of forests, Reforestation

Deforestation is considered to be the greatest contributing factor that resulted in the 1998 and 2001 floods. Therefore the cultivation of forested areas and the effect of the water of the region needed to be thoroughly investigated. Furthermore, UNDP hired a consultant to create a concept paper focusing on the result of deforestation and its implications in the Transcarpathia region as the ultimate solution for preventing future flood disasters is in preserving the forests and restoring natural forest ecosystems.



➤ Raising public awareness

Education and informational materials should be distributed to schools as well as to the general public to increase awareness about the significance of deforestation and other such factors that contribute to flooding.



➤ Looking out for the future

As a part of long-term management in the key governmental body of Ukraine in charge of disaster prevention and response, computer equipment was given to the special department in the Ministry of Emergencies, called the Division of Emergency Situations Prognosis, in order for it to be more resourceful and effective in case of an emergency such as this. This would ensure that the appropriate bodies in Ukraine would be properly informed and able to monitor the situation with accuracy and precision in a timely manner.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

As the Transcarpathia disaster left thousands of people in need of immediate assistance, UNDP Ukraine set into action and began its relief effort. The following table highlights specific aid given and number of people who benefited from this aid.

Assistance

Recipients

Medicines
Disinfectants, anti-bacterial, painkillers

Over 11,600 people in Vynohradiv,
Tiachiv, and Khust rayons

Computers for two secondary schools

More than 600 students in Tiachiv and
Vynohradiv rayons

Total population assisted: long-term
development and self sufficiency

300,000 people

EXPENDITURES

Transcarpathia: Disaster Response and Prevention
Bureau for Crisis Recovery and Response

PROJECT TOTAL – USD 50,000

<u>Description</u>	<u>Amount in USD</u>
Administrative Support	2,059.07
Salary and other costs for consultant	5,590.00
Translation of documents	429.17
TOTAL	8,078.24

<u>Description</u>	<u>Amount in USD</u>
Monitoring visits	538.37
Mission costs	1,594.48
TOTAL	2,132.85

<u>Date</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Amount in USD</u>
27 June 2001	Medical supplies	20,300.50

<u>Date</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Amount in USD</u>
7 August 2001 20 November 2001 11 December 2001	Equipment for renovated schools affected by flooding (Tiachiv, Vynohradiv)	19,380.01
24 December 2001	Ministry of Emergencies	108.40
	TOTAL	19,488.41

PROJECT TOTAL – USD 50,000