

The publications emitted by the Chamber rapidly followed up on by La Nacion, a newspaper closely linked to the agroexport sectors in the country. In its editorial page of August 14 (p.14a) and in the wake of ongoing severe flooding on the Atlantic Coast, the newspaper wrote:

"Faced with the new and difficult test that this region is now stoically facing, the State needs to revise its position as regards the Atlantic zone. If this has been so severely punished, it should at least enjoy preferential attention from the State and society. Man cannot impede earth quakes and tropical storms, but it is possible to mitigate the suffering of the area's inhabitants through prevision and an attitude on the part of the State which contemplates the global development of this region."

Calling for a strengthening of the National Emergency Commission and criticizing the "lack of action or inefficiency of the State", La Nacion openly attacked JAPDEVA (the decentralized State agency encharged with promoting development on the Atlantic Coast), public sector unions, the lack of attention to the social problems of the province, and, echoing the Chamber's earlier publications, "the government's persistent abandonment of port infrastructure which negatively affects imports and exports, and the national economy in general".

This series of three publications whilst openly demanding increased support for the province's overall development needs and for the export sectors in particular, could also be interpreted as a reflection of growing fears of disrupting social dissent in an area typified, historically, by high levels of organized social protest (see Valverde, Vargas and Lavell, 1987). The strategic position of the region in terms of export agricultural production and port infrastructure caused undoubted concerns as regards possible long term disrupting labour strikes and more generalized forms of social pressure.

La Nacion was, in fact, very explicit as regards the forms of social organization in Limon when it referred to:

"the power of the public sector unions in Limon which have consumed a good part of the resources that should have been used to promote the social and economic wellbeing of the province. How much money has been spent on bureaucracy and how much on real

development? Is it not true that hubs of union power have been established that do as they wish, seriously damaging the national economy?"

A "conspiracy" note was introduced into the lead article when La Nacion stated that the problems of the province:

"had not stimulated action on the part of the State. Rather they have been a stimulus for demagoguery and the organization of planned street protests generally led by persons interested in achieving, enhancing or maintaining personalistic leadership roles".

The overall impression gained from an analysis of the quoted publications, and considering the social situation in Limon, is that of a growing fear that a particular social crisis period (related to the earthquake and land flooding) in the context of a region suffering a permanent historical development crisis, could provide fertile ground for the outbreak of generalized forms of social protest guided by politically motivated interest groups.

The overall impact of any such development would be serious in national political and economic terms.

As regards the explicit demands made by La Nacion and the Chamber, little advance has been made to date in the construction of the third quay, but the government did heed the Chamber's call for the establishment of a high level action group included in its first publication. Thus, shortly afterwards a Governmental Intersectorial Commission was formed, coordinated by Enrique Montealegre, Presidential Advisor on Emergencies and Disasters, to take over the reconstruction strategy and activities from a somewhat beleaguered National Emergency Commission (See following section for a detailed analysis of the NEC).

The Commission, composed of representatives of the principle government ministries and decentralized agencies responsible for reconstruction activities, clearly had its own problems. Thus, on October 22, six months after the quake and a couple of months after the instigation of the Commission, Montealegre was quoted in La Nacion (October 23, p.5a) to have admitted that "each institution is working on its own, and because of this it is difficult to quantify the progress made".

In the opinion of important sectors of the local population clearly not much had been achieved and certainly Guillermo Madriz's earlier May prediction as regards the

total resolution of the problems within six months quickly passed into the annals of enlightened wishthinking.

The negative attitudes of the local groups came to a head in October when on the 16th various organized groups blocked the access to the city of Limon for six hours in the area near to the RECOPE petroleum refinery. The blockade was raised when Minister of the Presidency, Rodolfo Mendez Mata, agreed to travel to Limon to meet and negotiate with members of the Municipal Council and organized group leaders brought together under the umbrella of a recently created Executive Commission of the Open Session (Cabildo Abierto) of the Municipality.

Although Mendez Mata severely admonished the blockade, attributing such an action to "a reduced number of leaders" who were opposed to the majority feeling in favor of "dialogue and negotiation", the action would appear to have counted on the implicit or explicit support of various population groups and social sectors (see L.N. October 18, p.5a and L.R. October 18, p.6a). La Nación reported that the blockade was raised by "neighbours and students from Limon's Central Canton... (and) was supported by municipal workers, local commerce and the JAPDEVA union". The municipal workers declared an indefinite strike from midday onwards, and "at least 90% of commercial establishments in the city centre closed from 10 am - 2 pm".

Dr. Eric Castro, spokesman for the Executive Commission of the Open Session, explained the actions in terms of the lack of economic support for the region on the part of the government, adding that the "blockade was only the beginning of more far-reaching protests" (L.N. October 18, p.5a). Moreover, local leaders were also reported to have criticized the Government Intersectorial Commission established to negotiate with the community because "it is made up of middle ranking officials without the power to take decisions" (L.R. October 18, p.6a).

On Monday, 21st of October, Mendez Mata journeyed to Limon along with various other Ministers and Underministers to negotiate with the members of the Executive Commission. Commission spokesman Castro indicated that the negotiations sought to guarantee "a greater flow of resources in order to combat the historical problems of the province... which were aggravated by the April 22, earthquake" (L.N. October 19, p.5a).

The atmosphere of the negotiations was tinged with antagonisms and party political divisions. Thus, Mendez Mata had earlier objected to the Executive Commission which "showed a confrontive attitude conducive to the breakdown

of conversations", whilst President Rafael Angel Calderon was quoted as having attributed the October 16 protests to "a small group with ulterior intentions who did not have the support of the people" in the organization of the blockade (L.N. October 19, p.5a). On the other hand, certain members of the Executive Committee were already under pressure according to their political party allegiances. The negotiations commenced under the threat that should the dialogue breakdown new protests would start up including a new blockade and an indefinite general strike, which would include the municipal and dock workers (L.N. October 21 4a).

According to local press reports, the results of the negotiations were constructive, and undertaken in a frank and cordial manner. A calendar of meetings, between October 23 and November 14 was decided on. These meetings, dedicated to the discussion and resolution of problems relating to health, housing, infrastructure, banana taxes, education, public security and the possible privatization of RECOPE and JAPDEVA would be attended by high level government representatives (including Ministers and Executive Presidents of government decentralized agencies) and members of the Executive Commission of the Open Session. The end of the dialogue between Mendez Mata and local representatives was also marked by his announcement, a day later (October 22), after attending a meeting of the Governing Council, that the government would invest 12 billion colones (\$92 millions approximately) in Limon. According to La Nacion (October 26, p.8a), Mendez Mata categorically affirmed that the investment in the Atlantic zone would more than overcome the problems caused by the earthquake and "turn the region into a privileged place" compared to the rest of the country.

Given the sum quoted, this latter statement seems to be as overly optimistic as Guillermo Madriz's earlier "six months prediction". In itself it represented less than half of the \$200 millones the NEC had estimated was required merely "to bring (the region) back to the existing conditions prior to the earthquake" (Mendez, 1991), and under a quarter of Mendez Mata's own May estimate of 50 billions total losses.

Controversy over the leniency in channelling reconstruction funds to disaster stricken areas had flourished in Costa Rica in the aftermath of October 1988 flooding in Pacific Coast areas during Hurricane Juana, and following the 1990 quakes in Cobano, Puriscal and Alajuela. In the case of Limon similar problems were clearly being faced.

During the very early days following the April quake the government had been quick to announce the agreed reassignment of international credits for reconstruction purposes already approved for Costa Rica, and the negotiation of fresh funds. This was the case, for instance, with two credits from the World Bank for \$60 million and \$20 million dollars, a \$20 million dollars loan from the Interamerican Development Bank and \$ 18 .8 millions from the Venezuelan Investment Fund (see L.N. April 24 pp.4a, 5a; L.N. April 25 p.11a; L.N. April 26 p.4a).

In general, the prognosis was that these funds would be rapidly available to commence reconstruction activities and that the National Congress would alleviate the normal procedures for approving and assigning such funds.

This would not appear to have been the case. In late July, for example, the Congress approved in first debate a plan for investing 11.95 billion colones to finance a series of infrastructural works in Limon and for overcoming problems caused by Hurricane Juana (October 1988). 7.5 billion colones were assigned to Limon and the rest to Costa Rica's southern zone. (L.N. July 31, p. 6a). These funds were the same international funds being commented two days after the quake. And, both were probably related to the 12 billion colones promised by Mendez Mata on October 22. On this latter occasion, it was stated that the funds would come from loans obtained from the World Bank (\$35 millions), the Interamerican Development Bank (\$22 millions), the Venezuelan Investment Fund (\$10 millions) and the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (500 million colones).

Whatever the precise details of the whole problem of financing, the government clearly faced a series of difficulties related to the overall logistics and coordination of any proposed reconstruction and development process. Moreover, this end of year situation was also complicated by the latent or real conflicts and contradictions between the Limon based popular organization representatives themselves. La Nacion, in its October 25 edition (p.8a) concluded that.

"if, on the one hand, everyone in Limon is after the same thing - improvements in the province - it is also true that the behaviour of the local leaders could, paradoxically, ruin the little that has been achieved during months, especially as regards the expressed disposition of the government to instigate immediate actions".

Strategy differences between different members of the Municipal Council and Executive Commission came forth notoriously during October, underpinned by clear party political differences. The more conciliatory attitude proposed by "Social Christian party members of the Limon Municipal Council and independent politicians and professionals is not wellconsidered by various membersof the Executive Commission who demand immediate solutions", wrote La Nacion (October 26, p.8a). According to the newspaper this situation wasleading to pressures from the Social Christian block to replace five members of the Executive Commission including it's president, Marvin Wright (Authentic Limon Party), and four National Liberation party sympathisers, including Eric Castro. Moreover, the newspaper reported that the important Federation of Limon Workers (FETRAL) would be willing to participate in the Open Session if the five objected members were removed. According to FETRAL these lacked support within the Community and were "coloured politically".

Divisive forces, internal infighting and problems of coordination at national government andlocal organization levels, combined with bureaucratically slow assignation procededures at a legislative level seemed to capture the tone ofthe reconstruction efforts in Limonduring 1991. In the meantime the population was, in general, immersed in even more acute levels of poverty and unemployment than previously. Preexisting institutional and political characteristics, and contradictions at a national and regional level andhistorical problems were clearly coming to the forefront during a particular social crisis period triggered by the quake.

#### **4. Institutional and OrganizationalResponses During the Emergency Period.**

The earthquake undoubtedly took both the national authorities and the Atlantic region basically by surprise and unprepared. Many of the problems encountered during the immediate relief effort and the institucionalsolutions implemented undoubtedlyreflect preexisting organizational vulnerabilities, interacting witha complex territorial or geographicalcontext. The adequate coordinationof a relief effort played out over some 13000 sq.Km and potentially aimed at over 200000 people, many located in dispersed communities on the Atlantic Coastal plain and in the adjacent upland areas, is, under any circumstances, a complex task. This was even more so in Costa Rica, a country with an incipient and underfunded "disaster management" system, no armed forces or air hardware reserve, and scarceeconomic resources. Moreover, the fact

that important sectors of the inter and intra regional land transport network was severely damaged during the quake impeded easy access by land to many parts of the affected area for weeks or upto months after the event. transport network was severely damaged during the quake impeded easy access by land to many parts of the affected area for weeks or upto months after the event.

Despite the serious difficulties faced during the two weeks following the tremor which we will analyze in detail in this section of our document, the relatively successful overall relief effort under difficult conditions can be attributed to the rapid adaptability to the circumstances shown by many of the organizations involved and to the enthusiasm and self effacing commitment of many different institutions and individuals. In highlighting the problems faced our objective is not to present an academically sterile, critical and negative analysis, but, rather, to provide an evaluation which constructively identifies needed changes in the future.

#### 4.1 The overall context:

Very early on during the immediate post impact period numerous complaints were voiced regarding the social and territorial access to basic needs such as food and potable water, and in terms of the priorities established in the early rehabilitation process (repairs to basic infrastructure, in particular). These dissenting comments were voiced at both the local level, through population groups and institutional representatives (church, unions, Red Cross etc.) and at a national Parliamentary level where at times heated exchanges were reported between members of the opposing majority political parties (Social Christian and National Liberation). In general, it was the National Emergency Commission which was the major focus of this conflictive environment.

On an intraregional level apparently contradictory statements were reported from popular representatives in different zones. Thus, whilst the population of Limon City "complained of being ignored by the NEC, assuring that supplies have only been sent to distant regions" (L.R. April 26, p.7a), local groups in the outlying Turrialba area (Cartago Province) were voicing their concern that "they have been passed over by the NEC, which has directed all its attention to Limon Province" (L.R. April 26, p.8a).

Concern for the population living in outlying, isolated communities in southern and mountainous areas of the affected area was expressed by different professional groups and politicians. This was particularly so in the case of the indigenous Cabecar and Bribri populations of the Talamanca mountain and valley areas, many living proximate to the quake's epicentre in the Telire Valley.

Isolated by land, due to damage caused to local roads and bridges and extensive landslides, early fears were expressed as regards a potentially high loss of human life among the indigenous population. (see L.N. April 26, p.14a; L.N. April 27, p.16a; D.E. April 27, p.7). Although such concerns later turned out to be unfounded, many indigenous communities and others to the south of Limon received their first supplies from the outside from four and up to seven days after the quake (see L.R. May 1, p.10a; L.N. April 27, p.16a; L.N. April 29 pp. 4a and 12a).

Perhaps the most notorious case was reported in the June 14 edition of the English speaking weekly, the Tico Times. The small community of Cedral located in the upper reaches of the devastated Banano River Basin had received no help until the second week of June when two residents of the community managed to hike to Limon City. According to the Tico Times, the authorities did not even know the community existed.



In addition to the problems faced in the distribution of food, certain concerns were expressed in terms of the priorities assigned to early rehabilitation efforts to basic infrastructure. Electricity supplies were rapidly restored in a good part of the region, and a reported 40% of the potable water distribution system was supposedly restored a couple of days after the quake in Limon City. Moreover, rapid progress was made in reconditioning the major highway between Limon and San Jose and in restoring export facilities in the Limon-Moin port area.

This series of "priorities" could probably be amply justified on a social and economic level. And President Calderon, the day following the quake, clearly indicated that priority would be given to the evaluation of damages to basic infrastructure given that 80% of the country's exports were channelled through Limon and that "national production cannot be paralyzed". (L.N. April 23 p.2a Special Edition).

However, this argument did not convince everyone. The National Council for Small and Medium Scale Producers "Justice and Development" was quick to place the discussion on a more global and politically sensitive level. Thus, just two short days after the tremor the Council suggested that "the Government has only considered the export banana sectors in its emergency plans for Limon. Small and medium scale producers are unprotected and disastrous consequences will be felt very soon" (L.N. April 25, p. 13a).

This concern and its wider social implications would become an overriding theme in the coming months, as we have illustrated in the previous section of our document. A month later, for example, in a series of articles put together by "La Nacion," emphasis was given to the plight of the poorer small scale land holders, to difficulties in rehabilitating the short term production of crops, and to the lack of adequate food supplies given the drying up of the emergency distribution mechanisms (L.N. May 23, p.5a). The demanded role of the State was being taken up by such organizations as the European Economic Community, the Union of Small Scale Producers of the Atlantic (UPAGRA) and various ecclesiastical and humanitarian groups.

Although it is difficult to establish the exact extent to which priorities and distribution mechanisms were deliberately spatially and socially selective without more detailed and in depth research, there is no doubt that differential short term access to aid was experienced both within and between zones.

Various explanations were offered, ranging from the eminently technical or logistical to the openly political. Undoubtedly the truth lies mingled somewhere in the midst of the explanations offered.

From a logistical perspective, Rodolfo Mendez Mata, Minister of the Presidency, was quoted as having argued that "Limon was isolated by land, and 55000 families had to be attended using airtransport such that the possibility of helping everyone was extremely limited" (L.N. April 27, p.4a). This was undoubtedly true in terms of regional or zonal access given the wide dispersion of communities and the limited number of airborne units available.

Costa Rica has no airforce and only a limited number of small planes and helicopters in the hands of Public Security and other government agencies. Although various foreign governments and regional organizations made airborne transport available (particularly Nicaragua which sent five helicopters and The United Nations Vigilance Group for Central America (ONUCA) which provided three choppers), the range of demands for food distribution, evacuation of the injured and transport of repair equipment, put an undoubted strain on the available human and material resources.

A good part of the distribution of aid to dispersed and outlying communities was absorbed by experienced Nicaraguan Sandinista pilots who received widespread public acclaim from onsite workers, government officials and the local press for their tireless dedication and the seemingly endless numbers of sorties flown (see L.N. April 27, p.16a; L.N. April 29,)

The contribution of the Sandinista pilots and that made later by army engineers in bridge reconstruction, was to have an interesting sociological and political impact on Costa Ricans, rapidly changing the negative opinions (in ideological and nationalist terms) held by a good part of the population and built up over the period of the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua during the 1980's. The humanitarian efforts and the aid proffered by the Nicaraguans (including \$5 millions dollars in financial terms), led Guillermo Madriz, Minister of Public Works and Transport to praise such help, given in the midst " of their own poverty" (L.N. May 23 p. 5a).

This humanitarian aid (obviously tinged with other considerations of a political connotation), stands in contrast to the relatively limited bilateral help proffered by far more affluent governments, including the U.S. and Britain.

The U.S provided \$ 5 million dollars for road and bridge repairs through it's Agency for International Development (AID) and human resource aid through the Army Corps of Engineers. Some doubts could have been raised as to the motivations behind the financial help, when the Tico Times quoted Douglas Tinsler, AID Deputy Director, as having explained the U.S. governments' contribution as a gesture of satisfaction with Costa Rica's efforts to "make its economy healthy" (TT May 24 p.4). Even

disasters seem to maybe form part of the debate on structural adjustment and neoliberal economic policies!

The logistical difficulties faced, were not, however, the only factor contributing to the early problems in aid distribution. A second series of observations pertain to the absence of a prestablished, organized emergency strategy with clearly delineated lines of authority and role definition.

Although the National Emergency Commission is by law the maximum authority and coordinating body during emergency situations, the early days in Limon and Turrialba were typified by the uncoordinated role of numerous national and local governmental organizations, non governmental organizations and popular group representations. The national daily, La Prensa Libre, which seemed to specialize in highlighting problems and conflicts, summed up the situation in its April 26 edition (p.2) when it wrote:

"The organization of decision makers, the manner in which assistance has been channelled and an unstabilizing situation where there are more 'chiefs than indians' comprises a bottleneck which is undermining all of the ongoing efforts... Who can resolve this problem? This is a difficult question to answer given that the NEC, Public Security and Health authorities, autonomous institutions and local authorities are all giving orders which are at times at cross purposes and bely the fundamental objective of making food and water available to everyone, not only in the centre but also in outlying regions"

Very few clear examples of disorganization or interorganizational conflict were reported in the press which could help to substantiate the global evaluation offered. But, corroboration for this came from Humberto Trejos, Executive President of the NEC, who also commented on the "Chief /Indian" problem (L.N. April 27. p.4a); from Carlos Rojas, National Deputy for Limon, who declared that "there is lack of coordination, but this can be overcome" (L.R. April 27 p. 8a), and from numerous union, ecclesiastical and non governmental organizations.

The only clear case commented in detail in the press appeared in the April 28 edition of "La Nación, in an article entitled "Clashes between the Red Cross and the National Emergency Commission".

The newspaper reported that unnamed sources suggested

that the Red Cross had been discriminated against in terms of needed logistical support (air transport) for mobilizing food, medical and sanitary personnel. And, in terms of access to equipment for rescue operations. Later conflicts were also reported between the Red Cross and the newly formed Regional Emergency Commission.

The organizational problems faced in the early emergency period were increased, according to various observers, by overt party political maneuvering. When faced with the criticism that the NEC had become overly politicized in its decisions, Humberto Trejos, whilst denying the accusation, was also quoted as stating that "perhaps there have been occasions where non experts have imposed their criteria in view of their political investiture" (D.E. April 27 p.7). A day later he was also quoted as saying that "some politicians were interfering with the work of the Commission" (L.R. April 28 p.6a). National Liberation Party deputy Reynaldo Maxwell was more explicit in openly criticising the "improvisation and political criteria imposed by (Limon province) Governor Leidy Chacon and (Limon City's) municipal president" (D.E. April 30, p3). And, the call for greater government coordination expressed by National Liberation parliamentarians Rodrigo Oreamuno and Victor Emilio Castro, was given a more explicit political overtone by co-bencher Sigfrid Aixa who demanded that the aid approved by Congress should go directly to the affected population and not be used "to pay political bills" (D.E. April 27, p.4).

The criticism by the opposition party congressional members was duly rejected by various Social Christian deputies, and one of them (Danilo Chaverri) could not resist reminding Liberation members of the fraud perpetrated with 300 million colones of NEC funds during the early 1980's. This scandal had led to a prolonged legal case involving, among others, ex-National Liberation President, Luis Alberto Monge and Vice president Armando Arauz.

Following such skirmishes no one was really convinced when Rodrigo Oreamuno stated that "we are not interested in obtaining political gains from this situation" (L.R. April 27 p.8a).

The collective problems suffered during the first days of the emergency and the need for rapid correction mechanisms was adequately synthesized by La Nacion in an influential editorial article published on April 26, where it wrote:

"Whilst we recognize the celerity with which

the government acted... there has, however, been a lack of organization... A defined central authority is required... moreover, there is an urgent need to delegate authority in experienced and caring persons in order to rapidly attend to certain zones which have not received help and, also, to establish fluid channels of communications oriented by clear normative standards."

After four days of internal wrangling and public protest and on the same day as La Nacion's lead article, the Central government was to institute changes in the organizational set up, establishing clear lines of authority and a social and spatial division of responsibilities and roles.

The changes implemented were to help prevent an intensification of the limited number of "antisocial" acts experienced during these first days. Looting of the National Production Council stores had been reported in the Cieneguita area of Limon City, in Valle de la Estrella and in Sixaola, and numerous cases of speculation with the price of scarce food stuffs were registered, particularly in Limon City. (P.L. April 26 p.2; D.E. May 2, p.9; D.E. April 26 p.5; D.E. April 29, p.10; L.N. April 25).

#### 4.2 Institutional and Organizational Changes.

On April 26 the government announced that the Presidency and the Governing Council were to take over the global coordination of the short term relief efforts and the distribution of foodstuffs and basic needs.

President Calderon named his Minister of the Presidency, Rodolfo Mendez Mata, General Coordinator of the relief effort; Minister of Agriculture Juan Rafael Lizano, Coordinator in the Limon area and in the south of the province; and the Underminister of Agriculture was entrusted with the logistics at Limon's airport. Executive President of the National Institute for Housing and Urbanism (INVU), Juan Luis Delgado, was named head of mission for the communities of Bataan and Zent; Second Vicepresident, Arnoldo Lopez Echandi, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were to centralize the requests for and reception of international aid and the First Lady, Gloria Bejarano, national contributions to the relief effort. (see L.N. April 27 p.4a).

Despite veiled attempts to soften the "fait accompli" the National Emergency Commission was clearly the principal victim in this new institutional arrangement.