



# Protecting the Health of Hurricane Mitch Victims in Nicaragua: The EHP Rural Water Supply, Sanitation, and Environmental Health Reconstruction Program

## Background

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In October 1998, Hurricane Mitch left unprecedented destruction through the heart of Central America, leaving thousands dead and billions of dollars in damage. Nicaragua was hit particularly severely by Hurricane Mitch. USAID allocated nearly \$9.8 million over a 28-month period to protect the health of families by assisting rural communities affected by Mitch through construction or rehabilitation of community water systems, repair or replacement of household latrines, provision of environmental health education and promotion of hygiene behavior through activities at schools, clinics and resettlement areas.

## Objectives

The overall objective of the EHP/Nicaragua program was to protect and improve the health status of families affected by Hurricane Mitch in rural or re-settled population centers of Nicaragua. Program strategies included: increasing sustainable water supply and sanitation services for a minimum of 100,000 people and up to 200,000 people in these affected areas; improving hygiene behavior; and providing community organization and



education programs for people in areas of the country affected by Hurricane Mitch. This work was conducted through the Environmental Health Project (EHP). EHP served as program manager, overseeing management, grant dispersal, and providing technical oversight to private voluntary organization (PVO) grantees, which functioned as the program implementers.

## Program Partners

Action Against Hunger, Alistar, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), CARE, Save the Children USA, Plan International, Nicaraguan Water and Sewage



Company and Directorate of Rural Water Supply, EHP, and USAID.

## Program Highlights

With the focus on decreasing diarrheal disease, grants were awarded to six established in-country PVOs to work with communities to provide hygiene education, and reconstruct or build water and sanitation systems in areas hit by Hurricane Mitch.

The results exceeded program objectives. EHP and its partners reached an estimated 215,000 beneficiaries in 289 rural communities, within 43 municipalities in 9 departments spread across northern Nicaragua.

Program outputs included: 2692 water supply systems, 7226 household latrines, 295 boreholes, and water and sanitation to services 40 health clinics. In addition, all hygiene behavior change targets were achieved. The PVO partners have documented increases in improved hygiene practices such as correct handwashing (from 53 to 86%) and safe excreta disposal (from 62 to 85%). A reduction in diarrhea prevalence from 20% to 12% in children under five also occurred.

One of the most significant aspects of the EHP program in Nicaragua was its strategic impact on re-defining the emphasis of water supply and sanitation interventions – by reinforcing the conceptual shift from a water and

sanitation intervention to a health intervention integrating hygiene promotion with water and sanitation infrastructure components among others. Nongovernmental organizations and other key players have recognized and welcomed this change in approach. The environmental health director of the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health has called it a “new paradigm” for water and sanitation interventions that places them in the center of preventive health efforts.

*Please see EHP Activity Report Number 106 for complete information. To request a copy, please email: [info@ehproject.org](mailto:info@ehproject.org)*