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FEDERACIÓN NACIONAL DE MADRES, PADRES Y FAMILIAS DE PERSONAS CON DISCAPACIDAD DE HONDURAS

# How can the World Bank improve climate resilience and universal access in reconstruction projects?

## Introduction

Tropical storms Eta and Iota hit Honduras, Guatemala, and Nicaragua in November 2020 to become some of the most damaging weather events in the past two decades. On November 3, Eta´s torrential rains in northern Honduras caused floods and landslides. Just 13 days later, Iota followed the same trajectory and further increased humanitarian needs and food insecurity.

Climate change is a global challenge as much as it is a regional one in Latin America. Its consequences (droughts, hurricanes, floods, etc.) urgently require the development of adaptation and mitigation strategies that address the region's social, environmental, and economic realities. One challenge that certain marginalized groups face is that a substantial amount of adaptation and mitigation projects are designed and planned without effectively engaging marginalized groups. This exacerbates inequalities and further excludes these populations from accessing project benefits. At the same time, these groups are the ones who generate the least emissions,[1] yet they are the most exposed to the negative consequences of climate change since they have fewer resources to avoid or adapt to such impacts and risks.

In this sense, climate change and disability are heavily interconnected, as persons with disabilities face greater challenges when climate fueled natural disasters hit. This includes barriers to accessing rebuilt infrastructure that is not disability friendly, accessing financial services or resources in the aftermath of disaster, and gaining employment opportunities. Thus, building new infrastructure that is only climate resilient is not enough, because persons with disabilities will not be able to access them. Reconstruction in the aftermath of Eta and Iota must be climate resilient and also accessible.

The Bank Information Center (BIC) and its partners, Social Forum on External Debt and Development of Honduras (FOSDEH) and the National Federation of Mothers, Fathers, and Families of People with Disabilities (FENAPAPEDISH), assessed project documents, including social and environmental assessments. Beyond that, a series of interviews were conducted with WB officials, the government of Honduras, and project-affected communities to assess how the project includes accessible climate resilience measures in line with the Environmental and Social Framework (ESF). Two field visits to the communities were conducted in November 2022 and February 2023.

This report identifies the project's shortcomings in designing and implementing inclusive accessibility and climate resilience measures. It provides evidence-based recommendations to the Bank's officials, technical teams, and the implementing agencies to strengthen project implementation.

1 See Oxfam's report about extreme carbon inequality: www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/mb-extreme-carbon-inequality-021215-en.pdf

## Project Description

On December 18, 2020, the World Bank approved a loan of US$150 million for Honduras for social relief and the reconstruction of infrastructure in the aftermath of Eta and Iota. The works would be framed under a National Plan for Sustainable Development Reconstruction (PNRDS), which was led by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). The local implementing agency in Honduras is the national Agency of Community Development, Water and Sanitation (SEDECOAS).

According to project documents, the project has three main components:

1. Relief and emergency operations, response and public health and safety.
2. Resilient rehabilitation and reconstruction of public and community infrastructure and public services (hospitals and health centers, schools, sanitation and community infrastructure).
3. Institutional support for the Government's recovery and reconstruction program.

Following a request made by our local partners in April 2022, the project's Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) was finally published in Spanish. The document requests that SEDECOAS conduct an environmental and social assessment of the main project, to be followed by specific evaluations of subprojects (infrastructure works in the health sector, sanitation, schools, and community buildings). According to the project documents, each subproject "needs a specific Social and Environmental Management Plan (ESMP), which should include their respective social and environmental assessment." These documents should also be accompanied by a short file of basic information on the "environmental and social viability," which would identify risks, impacts, and mitigation measures. The project's ESMF, in line with the Bank's ESF, defined mechanisms for free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC), consultations, grievances during project implementation, and training for the workers' projects.

The Honduran presidential election in 2021 and changes in the national and local administrations led to significant delays in the start of the second component. Works from a first "package," comprising about 30 schools, began in the second half of 2022 and is currently under implementation.

The Project Appraisal Document (PAD) states that all investments supported under the project should be climate resilient through the use of design standards, increasing assets' resilience to higher return period events, enforcing building code legislation, or upgrading from its provisions where needed.

The ESMP states that the technical specifications included in the Universal Accessibility Plan of Honduras must be included in all the repairs, construction, or expansions of damaged infrastructure. In addition, public roads and sidewalks should remain free of obstacles that may pose a danger to and restrict the mobility of people with disabilities. Adequate signage should also be incorporated to facilitate the transit of people with disabilities and promote adequate and ethical forms of assistance and support. The ESCP specifies that reconstructing with Universal Access design includes "restoration/replacement of ramps, elevators and toilets for persons with disabilities, and incorporation of new or additional universal access provisions whenever technically and financially feasible." Also, the World Bank's Global Disability Summit Commitment states that "all projects financing public facilities in post-disaster reconstruction are disability-inclusive by 2020." To achieve this, persons with disabilities must be included in the assessment of the disaster risk and in designing and implementing plans that are tailored to their specific needs.

## Main Findings

The findings below show that environmental and social priorities, alongside the provisions surrounding disability inclusion in project documents, were not represented in operations.

1. **Poor FPIC and stakeholder engagement process.** In 2020, SEDECOAS published a Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) in English that described how the agency would engage with project-affected communities and other stakeholders. These groups included residents of the storm hit areas, marginalized groups (among them ethnic minorities), and those affected by the loss of public services. The SEP identified various means of communication, such as TV, webpages, social networks, local media, and newspapers, to address the specific needs of those groups and provide clear messages and translations to indigenous languages. However,
    - According to interviews with teachers and workers of the schools where reconstruction works are being conducted, **the implementing agency did not adequately socialize the project within the community.** Only a handful of meetings were conducted, which

were not systematically organized, to get input from the communities, with few people in attendance and no follow-up procedures. Interviewed school communities (headmasters and teachers) also reported not receiving any detailed information on the projects or communication materials.

- There are no records or evidence of the use of other means of communication as suggested in the ESF (tv, newspapers, webpage, etc.)
- The project failed to provide safe project-level grievance procedures for parties affected by the project. For instance, members of the community in La Twana, Choloma, reported refraining from using the existing complaint mechanisms due to threats and possible retaliation from violent groups. It is estimated that about 90 percent of the schools in the project area are located in socially marginalized areas.
- There are no reports that prove that SEDECOAS made additional efforts to secure the involvement of marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities and ethnic groups such as Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendants, in the participation process, as requested by the ESF.

2. **Lack of disclosure of the Environmental and Social Impact Assessments.** The Environmental and Social Impact Assessments of the subprojects in the first package were not published on the project website when the construction work started. Neither was the site-specific Biodiversity Management Plan reported, which had also been requested in the ESF.
3. **The ESMP does not provide enough information to consider alternatives for investments.** The ESMP was done at a large scale without evaluating the specific infrastructure works to be conducted, and it does not even provide a list or a location of the type of buildings to be reconstructed or built from scratch. Therefore, the ESMP does not provide enough information to consider alternatives for investments, including the possibility of not going forward (no go), location of the proposed infrastructure, risks associated with extreme weather events (such as the tropical storms that cause the destruction that led to the design of the project), accessibility risks associated with building locations, or any mitigation measures that should be put in place to minimize risks.
4. **Existing infrastructure is not adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities.** During the interviews, it was clear that existing infrastructure is not adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities, and construction firms were unaware of any specific measures that should be adopted to tackle those barriers or specific signage to improve accessibility.
   - The reconstruction of schools did not adequately include new climate resilience and accessibility measures. It is unclear why the damaged schools were rebuilt using the same construction techniques in areas prone to storms, next to rivers or mountain slopes, which would require additional protective measures to reduce vulnerability to storms and mudslides (like wind-protective barriers, walls, etc). Only about half of the visited schools allow free movement and access (those are classified as barrier free), even though the implementing agency included a section in the management plan on accessibility issues (with topics such as ramps, bathrooms, etc.). The lack of consideration for these measures could have been averted through a risk identification process or the participation of the communities.
   - School personnel reported that they had pushed SEDECOAS to consider inclusive designs for buildings, but they were not invited to participate in the design. For example, in some cases (CEPB León Alvarado), the students' parents built ramps themselves as the original designs did not include them.
   - The lack of capacity of school personnel on accessibility issues has been worsened by SEDECOAS' failure to provide specific training. School communities, including headmasters and teachers, have downplayed the importance of an accessible design on the alleged grounds that no students with disabilities were attending the school or because of concerns about who would cover the costs of such adaptations.
5. **FENAPAPEDISH and FOSDEH did not have access to any environmental management plan or waste treatment plan.**
   - In many cases, waste from construction works was placed next to the schools without any treatment. No document was published on the obligations of the implementing agency to publish regular monitoring reports of environmental and social indicators of the project.

- There were no reports of training or capacity-building activities on environmental risks conducted with project workers (garbage disposal, liquids, etc) or with the project-affected communities, which were requested by the project's documents (ESMP).

## Discussion with the World Bank and the Honduran authorities

At a meeting on April 14, 2022, with FENAPAPEDISH and FOSDEH, representatives of the World Bank, and the government of Honduras acknowledged the difficulties they faced during the implementation of the first package of sub-projects and agreed to take measures to address the situation. They discussed the importance of considering the social and environmental issues mentioned above, including limitations for persons with disabilities. The World Bank and government officials admitted there was not enough supervision during the FPIC process, noting that the Ministry of Finance pressured the executing unit to meet the deadlines without completing the necessary steps (FPIC) over fears that the project would expire and the funding could be canceled.

## Recommendations

As only a small portion of the construction work has started, it is imperative that the Bank and SEDECOAS take steps to address deficiencies in the early stages of the project.

1. **Improve Stakeholder Engagement.** The Bank must effectively oversee that the implementing agency conducts a robust stakeholder engagement process to understand the needs of the community, improve the functionality of the buildings to be constructed, and reduce social and environmental risks. In compliance with ESS10, this process should be done systematically throughout the project cycle and involve a solid communication strategy.
2. **Design robust grievance mechanisms at the project level.** The Bank should supervise the grievance mechanisms so that they are accessible and transparent for project-affected people to raise concerns and complaints about possible environmental and social harm. The mechanism should be available to all affected people, with special consideration for marginalized groups.
3. **Produce and disclose information on the subprojects.** This should include, at a minimum: the location and scale of the proposed works; possible impacts on biodiversity; vulnerability to social and environmental risks; and evidence that the proposed works will be resilient to extreme tropical events. These are basic requirements to guarantee the safety of the people and biodiversity.
4. **Adjust the project based on their existing standards and the Paris alignment adaptation methodology.** As climate change will likely increase the frequency and severity of storms in Honduras (and the whole region), the Bank should do more to adjust projects based on their own ESS3 and methodology for Paris alignment on climate change adaptation (notably Step A3, "Risk Management"). These require that works be resource-efficient (e.g., with respect to water and energy use) and incorporate measures to reduce both the probability of the risk occurring (e.g., avoiding flood-prone areas) and its impact (e.g., waterproofing perimeters and improving drainage).
5. **Publish environmental management plans.** The implementing agency should publish the environmental management plan detailing the actions to be taken as well as a timeframe for implementation.
6. **Improve Accessibility.** Supervise that the construction works are designed with the inputs of persons with disabilities and developed according to national and international standards on universal accessibility. Blueprints of the projects should be shared with stakeholders to guarantee that the necessary measures are being adopted.
7. **Provide capacity-building training.** This training should be provided to the constructors and local communities on the social and environmental issues of the project, such as accessibility, participation, grievance mechanisms, security, garbage disposal, and anything else required by the project's ESMF.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE ISSUES RAISED IN THIS REPORT, PLEASE CONTACT BANK INFORMATION CENTER AT:

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