

## NOTES

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### THE LONDON TECHNICAL GROUP

The principal objective of the London Technical Group is to foster a more informed and reasoned approach to disaster relief. It tries to do this by opening lines of communication between technologists and those concerned with relief programs, presenting new techniques in an understandable way, and undertaking research where required.

The Group has a membership drawn from many disciplines within technology, social sciences and economics, as well as nutrition, medicine, and other biological sciences. Most members are active researchers in institutions based mainly in London and work with the Group on a voluntary basis. The Group has an office with a full-time administrator and a research-coordinator.

Among activities carried out have been the following:

#### (1) Meetings

The Group organized an international symposium on disaster relief in September 1971 and since then numerous meetings and seminars on specialist subjects related to different aspects of relief have been held. Working parties have been established: one with the relief agencies to explore ways in which the Group's expertise could best be employed; the second to discuss the initiation and funding of new research. Seminars are now regularly held where members and guests bring forward for discussion work in which they have been engaged, ranging from the economic impact of food-aid to meteorological warning systems.

#### (2) Surveys

The work to date has included a nutritional survey in Upper Volta carried out at the request of a British relief agency in July, 1973. General surveys of rehabilitation and of refugee camp conditions have also been carried out in Bangladesh in 1972 and in West Bengal in 1971, and a general review of the whole East Pakistan/Bangladesh catastrophe from 1970 to 1972 is in preparation. In 1973–1974 fieldwork was undertaken for a relief agency in Wollo province, Ethiopia, and later in 1974 a nutritional, social and economic survey was conducted in southern Ethiopia.

#### (3) Instrument Design

Three instruments have been designed by the Group to supplement currently available apparatus. A folding tripod enables a commercially available spring balance to be used for weighing adults and children in all age categories. The tripods have been tested in Bangladesh and Upper Volta and are now used in many parts of the world.

#### (4) Bibliography Project

A bibliography of relevant publications, papers and reports have been prepared with support from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and Pergamon Press. Some 400 references are abstracted, cross-referenced and indexed, and review of the work is included. This work was published as *Disaster Technology: An Annotated Bibliography* in January 1974. A second edition is in process with some 60 abstracts added to bring the subject up to date. The bibliography has been chosen as the basic document for the 1975–1976 "Design for

Disaster Relief" program set up by the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design in collaboration with the League of Red Cross Societies.

Future plans of the Group include: (1) a permanent disaster survey unit with a core of full-time personnel, who would both maintain a bank of current disaster information and always be ready and available for rapid assessment in the field; (2) an abstracting service of the disaster literature continuing and expanding the work begun with the bibliography; and (3) a closer connection with problems of development in Third World countries.

Additional information about the Group may be obtained from Dr. John Seaman, London Technical Group, c/o Institute of Biology, 41 Queen's Gate, London SW7 5HU, Great Britain.

#### **INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON DISASTER EPIDEMIOLOGY**

An International Seminar on Disaster Epidemiology, organized by the Prince Leopold Institute of Tropical Medicine and the Research Center on Disaster Epidemiology of the University of Louvain, Belgium, was held in that country in December, 1975.

Scientists from over 10 countries met with officials of the main relief agencies including Red Cross, Catholic Relief Services, Ordre Souverain de Malte, Save the Children Fund and War on Want; representatives of UN institutions, including WHO, UNDRO, E E C, PAHO and FAO, and with bilateral agencies, including UNSAID and the Belgian Cooperation to Development, for the purpose of studying health management in the disaster field.

The following scientific topics were presented and discussed:

- Epidemiology of disasters by Professor M.F. Lechat (Belgium).
- Natural disasters and communicable diseases by K. Western (WHO/PAHO).
- Catastrophes naturelles et malnutrition by

M. Oupin and AM. Raimbault (France).

– Case study: flood in Czechoslovakia by J. Cervenka; earthquake in Iran by A.A. Moinfar.

– Epidemiologie de la famine by H. Vis (Belgium).

– Surveillance and prediction of food shortages and malnutrition by J.B. Mason (F.A.O.)

– Nutritional indicators by E. De Maeyer (W.H.O.).

– Principes de l'intervention en cas de famine by C. de Ville de Goyet (Belgium).

– La secheresse au Niger by I. Camara (Niger).

– Epidemiological surveillance of P.C.M. and of specific deficiencies by W. Foege (U.S.A.).

– Clinical lesions of retinal deficiency by H. Oomen (Netherlands).

– Vitamin A and protein intake by S. Franken (Netherlands).

– Epidemiologie de la vitaminose A au Niger by M.F. Lechat (Belgium).

– Case study: Ethiopia by J. Rivers (England).

Representatives of WHO, UNDRO, PAHO, EEC, Red Cross, Catholic Relief Services and Algerian Government presented the policy and problems of their organizations in time of disasters. The participants agreed upon the following conclusions and recommendations:

1. Mass immunization campaigns against cholera, typhoid fever, and other diseases are usually not top health priorities in cases of disaster. Furthermore, they result in resource depletion and are thus counterproductive. Preference should be given to the setting up of an epidemiological surveillance system to provide decision makers with the required information.

2. Quick initial assessment of the situation is required to adjust the assistance provided to the actual needs. In spite of the urgency of the situation, statistically sound techniques are necessary if any valid recommendations and decisions are to be made. It is recommended that scientists be supported from relief funds in order that such rapid, fruitful, assessments can be made.

3. In time of famine, care should be taken to provide emergency food familiar to the assisted population. National authorities and relief agencies are urged to provide skimmed milk powder enriched with vitamin A in view of the evidence of widespread retinal deficiency in a famine-affected population.

4. Universities are invited to contribute to the training of medical and non-medical health workers and relief volunteers by producing audiovisual aids and technical handbooks.

5. Scientific researchers must seek a solution to specific problems faced by relief organizations, members of which are invited to call upon scientists' expertise for evaluation of their organization's performance.

The proceedings of the colloquium will be published in a special issue of the "Annales de la Société Belge de Médecine Tropicale." Copies of the main presentations may be requested at the following address:

Centre de Recherche sur l'Epidémiologie des  
Désastres  
Epid 30.34  
Ecole de Santé Publique  
Clos Chapelle-aux-Champs, 30  
B-1200 Bruxelles

#### NOTICE OF PARIS MEETING

On July 27–28, 1976 the Centre d'Etudes Psychosociologiques des Sinistres et de leur Prévention is organizing a meeting of social and behavioral science disaster researchers in Paris, France. This meeting, scheduled the week after the World Congress of Psychology sessions in Paris is partly intended to let those attending the World Congress become aware of what is going on in disaster research. However, the meeting is also intended to further the exchange of ideas among disaster researchers. Persons wanting to obtain further details and information should write immediately to Charles Chandessais, Director, CEPSP, 28 rue d'Assas, 75006 Paris, France.