

Taming of Floods in Trinidad

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Abstract

Every year, many areas in Trinidad are adversely affected by severe flooding in the aftermath of intense rainstorms. As a consequence, there are considerable disruptions in the socio-economic activities, and the annual financial losses in the agricultural, industrial and commercial sectors conservatively run into tens of millions of dollars. In addition, at times, there has also been loss of human lives and structural damage to buildings, roads and bridges. Moreover the solution to the flooding problems and the public debate surrounding the same, has hitherto centred essentially on the classical hydraulic engineering approach of attempting to control or eliminate floods by constructing embankments and dredging, widening, paving and straightening watercourses. However, this one-dimensional approach to a multi-dimensional problem has been ineffective. Indeed, due to the creation of an illusion of flood security and the absence of land use controls, it has often resulted in increased flood damage. Further, global experience has shown that while controlling floods is impossible, managing them – for reducing hazards to lives and property by the most cost effective measure – is not. An appreciation of this distinction is central to the development of a flood policy framework. It is against such a background that this paper presents a critical review of some of the issues relating to the flooding problem in Trinidad, in the hope that it would be useful in formulating a much needed flood management strategy.