



**USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA)  
East Asia and Pacific Region, Regional Office for Asia-Pacific, Bangkok, Thailand**

**DISASTER RESPONSE**

**USAID/OFDA Responds to the New Zealand Earthquake**

On the afternoon of February 22, people in Christchurch, New Zealand, were going about their normal lunchtime routine when a magnitude 6.3 earthquake rattled the city, trapping people under collapsed buildings, causing extensive damage to the city center, and killing hundreds of individuals.

In response to a request from the Government of New Zealand, USAID/OFDA immediately mobilized a USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team, including a 74-person urban search and rescue (USAR) team from the Los Angeles County Fire Department, to help with search and rescue operations. USAID also activated a Washington, D.C.-based Response Management Team to coordinate the U.S. Government humanitarian response to the earthquake.

The U.S. USAR team joined a multinational search and rescue effort on the ground in Christchurch, fully or partially clearing 16 city blocks and searching 23 buildings in the central business district for possible trapped survivors. U.S. USAR team structural engineers also put their technical expertise to work by providing guidance to New Zealand city planners on the stability of damaged buildings and ways to safely demolish unsound structures. To replace equipment lost during the earthquake and enhance domestic search and rescue capacity for future earthquakes, USAID authorized the transfer of approximately \$405,000 in sophisticated detection and rescue equipment to the New Zealand Fire Service.



*Top: New Zealand Prime Minister John Key thanks the USAID/DART and the U.S. USAR team for their efforts. (Photo by Travis Betz, USAID/OFDA)*

*Bottom: U.S. USAR engineers work with their New Zealand counterparts to assess the stability of buildings. (Photo courtesy of the L.A. County Fire Department)*

**DISASTER RESPONSE**



*Maize flattened by Cyclone Vania. (Photo courtesy of the U.N.)*

**USAID/OFDA Responds to Pacific Cyclones**

In January, Cyclones Vania and Wilma swept through Vanuatu and Tonga, respectively, bringing damaging heavy rains and strong winds to several island communities. In response, USAID/OFDA is providing funding to local relief organizations to distribute emergency supplies, targeting the most vulnerable individuals.

In Vanuatu and Tonga, the cyclones damaged traditional houses, other infrastructure, and crops and fruit trees—the main source of food and income for many families—as well as washed away household items. To help families replace some of the items lost in the cyclones, USAID/OFDA provided \$175,000 through the U.S. Embassies in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, and Suva, Fiji, for distribution of emergency relief supplies. These items serve as a first, small step in helping families begin to recover from the effects of the storms and support the broader assistance provided by the respective governments.

## Responding to Disasters and Building Response Capacity in the Philippines

Located on the western Pacific typhoon belt and the fringes of the Pacific ring of fire, the Philippines is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world. Communities in the Philippines face an array of disasters, including drought, earthquakes, floods, landslides, typhoons, and volcanic eruptions. While continuing to provide immediate relief in response to these events, USAID/OFDA is also expanding assistance for disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities in particularly vulnerable areas of the country.

### Widespread Floods Hit the Philippines

Between December and February, several waves of heavy rains inundated central and southeastern Philippines, particularly affecting communities in Eastern Visayas and Caraga regions. According to the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GoRP), floods and landslides had killed 110 people, injured 13 others, and damaged nearly 6,000 houses throughout the country as of early February.



**A flood-affected family receives local government assistance at an evacuation site. (Photo by Al Dwyer, USAID/OFDA)**

A subsequent USAID assessment of flood-affected areas in the Philippines highlighted the importance of DRR initiatives in helping to avert a more serious disaster. USAID staff noted that communities where local government units had taken leadership in preparing for and mitigating the impacts of the floods appeared to have sustained less significant impacts from the floods.

In particular, USAID/OFDA staff observed that in St. Bernard Municipality—the site of devastating landslides in 2006—local government officials already had systems in place to warn the community and respond to the floods, which minimized flood-related casualties.

In areas where ongoing floods overwhelmed response capacity, including several island and low-lying areas of Eastern Visayas and Caraga regions, USAID/OFDA supported the distribution of relief supplies, such as hygiene kits and water purification tablets, to affected families in coordination with USAID/Philippines. This assistance, valued at \$100,000, supported efforts to avert increases in water-borne diseases in flood-affected communities.

### Expanding Support for Disaster Preparedness

To strengthen preparedness and response capacity in the Philippines, USAID/OFDA has provided \$750,000 to the U.N. World Food Program (WFP) to provide technical support to the GoRP Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and other government agencies. Building on WFP's experience in responding to disasters, this initiative will help DSWD—the agency mandated with coordinating disaster responses—to map and analyze vulnerable areas, implement cash-for-work activities that increase communities' resilience to disasters, and manage and track relief items in a central warehouse in Manila and 17 regional warehouses. WFP will also provide training to national and local GoRP agencies on disaster response management utilizing best practices.

## DISASTER RESPONSE

### Small Interventions Make a Big Impact in the Tsunami-Affected Mentawai Islands

In October 2010, a tsunami struck the Mentawai Island chain in Indonesia, washing away houses and many families' belongings. In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, several adults and children, particularly people staying in displaced person camps, began to show signs of diarrhea, skin rashes, and breathing problems—health problems typically associated with limited water and sanitation access—increasing concerns regarding the spread of diseases.

“Possible health problems are high. The people of Mentawai know how to live clean and healthy, but the condition that we are currently living in makes this impossible,” a tsunami-affected resident of South Pagai Island noted. To make an immediate impact on water and sanitation conditions in affected areas, USAID/OFDA provided support to Mercy Corps to distribute 1,000 water buckets to affected families as a part of the larger response. Families can utilize the buckets to collect rain water or transport water from the river, the communities' traditional water source, and wash themselves or clean their clothes. With this small and low-cost intervention, USAID/OFDA was able to quickly improve tsunami-affected individuals' access to water and help prevent a large-scale outbreak of disease.

### Supporting Community-Based Disaster Management in China

China's vast and diverse landscape makes it vulnerable to a wide range of disasters. In most cases, local communities are not only affected by the disasters, they are also the first to respond. These communities require support and tools to plan for and respond to disasters.

Recognizing this need, USAID/OFDA is funding a new two-year The Asia Foundation (TAF) program to support innovative community-based disaster mitigation and school-based disaster education activities in 250 to 300 communities in three provinces of China. The program builds and expands on two previous USAID/OFDA-supported TAF initiatives that trained more than 100 teachers on ways to disseminate DRR knowledge to students, as well as helped four pilot cities/counties develop hazard maps, improve early warning systems, and develop emergency plans, among numerous other initiatives. USAID/OFDA has provided \$500,000 in Fiscal Year 2011 for this initiative.



**Under the pilot program, TAF also provided volunteers with first aid training and conducted disaster simulation exercises. (Photo courtesy of TAF)**

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