



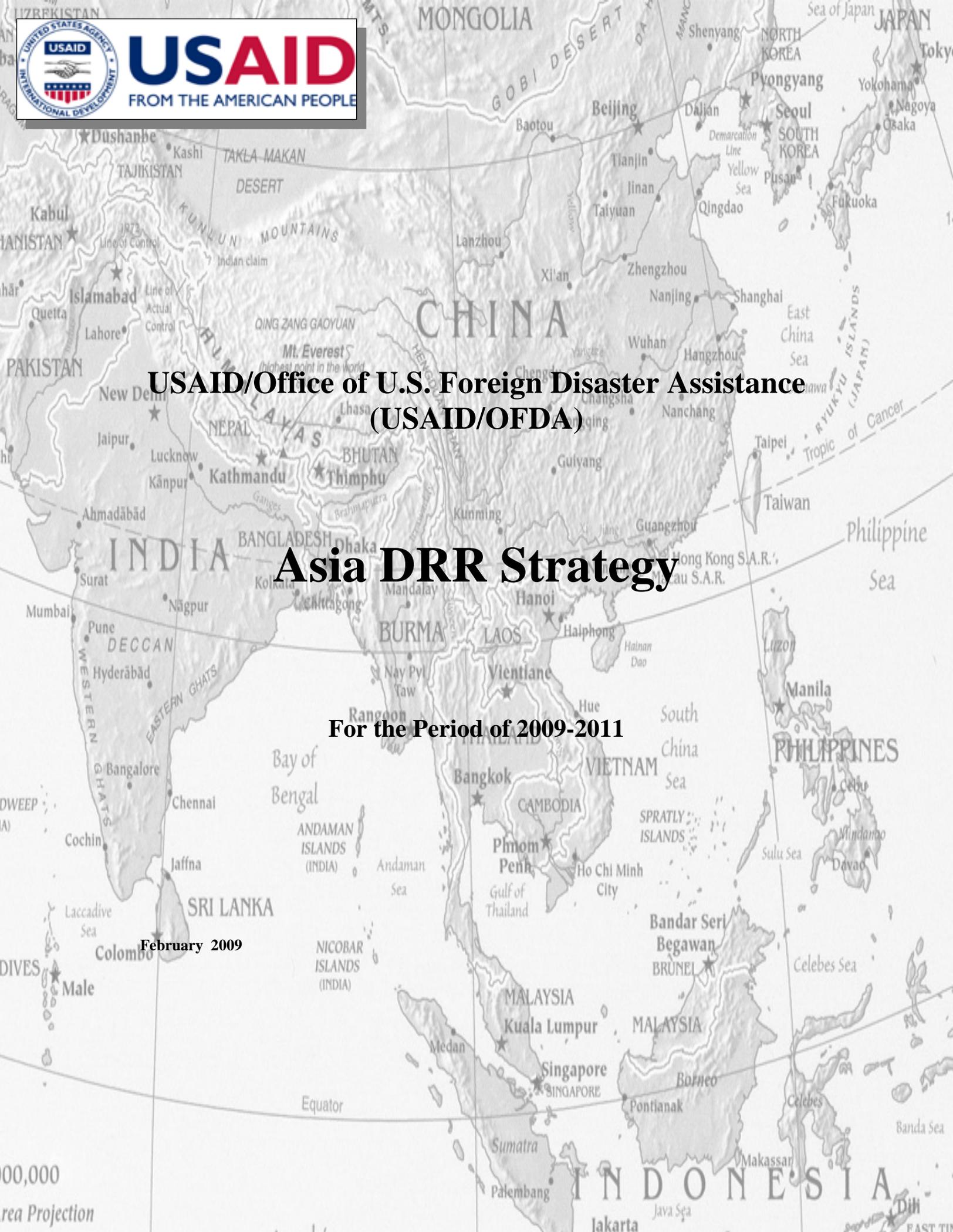
**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

**USAID/Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance  
(USAID/OFDA)**

**Asia DRR Strategy**

**For the Period of 2009-2011**

**February 2009**



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Area Projection

**OFDA Mission Statement for Asia:**  
**To fulfill OFDA's mandate in the region by leading U.S. Government humanitarian assistance in disaster response and risk reduction through support for regional capacity and targeted programs for vulnerable communities.**

## **Background**

OFDA leads U.S. Government response for international disaster assistance for natural and human-induced emergencies and provides assistance to help vulnerable populations prepare for, mitigate, respond to, and recover from these emergencies. OFDA recognizes the need to develop a longer-term strategic approach to its activities that will articulate program priorities, streamline decision-making, define responsibilities, and allow a more definitive transition from humanitarian to developmental assistance.

OFDA has more than fifteen years of experience implementing assistance programs in Asia, earning OFDA a leading position in the region's disaster management community. Given the size of the region and the increasing number of natural disasters and conflicts, OFDA implements regionally focused disaster risk reduction (DRR) programs designed to benefit vulnerable populations, particularly in rapidly urbanizing areas. Through this selective approach, programs implemented at the regional level are affordable and replicable to achieve the greatest impact.

OFDA encourages collaboration with USAID missions and the international community to focus on short- to medium-term risk reduction activities that aim to transition into longer-term risk reduction activities. These activities promote local, national, and regional capabilities to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. In recent years, international attention and investment in DRR activities in the Asia region verified the effectiveness of OFDA's approach, yet challenges to establish DRR understanding, change national behavior, and design cohesive DRR programs remain.

This strategy defines OFDA DRR activities in the region. It emphasizes improved regional cooperation, awareness, and capabilities for effective programming and strives to reduce the risks of natural hazards on vulnerable communities.

### **OFDA's Mandate**

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) has the responsibility to provide foreign disaster assistance and to coordinate the response of the U.S. Government (USG) to disasters abroad.

OFDA's mandate is to **save lives, alleviate suffering, and reduce the economic impact of disasters. OFDA does this by:**

- Providing rapid, appropriate response to requests for assistance;
- Strengthening capacity of local, national, regional, and international entities on early warning practices that mitigate against natural hazards;
- Fostering self-sufficiency among disaster-prone nations by helping achieve some measure of preparedness; and
- Enhancing recovery from disasters through rehabilitation programs.

## Asia Context

The Asia region<sup>1</sup> is experiencing increased risks to a variety of natural, technological, and human-induced disasters. Rising trends in threats to vulnerable populations include conflict and acts of terrorism, migration and displacement, water scarcity, population pressures—particularly in rapidly urbanizing areas and settlement in marginal lands—and the increased threat of technological hazards. Recurring natural disasters induced by the region’s most frequent hazards of typhoons, floods, earthquakes, and drought significantly reduce resilience to the effects of economic, agricultural, and environmental losses.

Of these trends, conflict and the threat of terrorist activity cause heightened regional concerns and have potentially global consequences. The destabilizing effects of widening local and civil conflicts have disrupted economic activity and increased rural and urban discord region-wide. Forced population movements caused by conflict, land and water scarcity, and lack of economic opportunity have increased Asia’s vulnerability and disaster recovery time, and lowered resiliency in crisis conditions. Rapid urbanization in a majority of the countries will continue,<sup>2</sup> and the capacity of the region’s cities to plan, build, and manage risk reduction to meet the predicted population growth is inadequate or non-existent.

Parts of South and Southeast Asia are experiencing absolute water scarcity, a phenomenon defined as insufficient water to maintain food production from irrigated agriculture or meet domestic, industrial, and environmental water demands and similar to that identified in parts of the Middle East and northern Africa<sup>3</sup>. In addition, overtaxing groundwater aquifers triggers natural releases of harmful chemicals in water sources such as arsenic, leading to significant human and environmental health consequences.

In Asia, climate and weather hazards such as floods, droughts, and cyclones induce 86 percent of natural disasters and account for approximately 99 percent of the population affected by natural hazards.<sup>4</sup> The vulnerability to climate variability and change remains high in the region due to exposure to multiple hazards, rapid urbanization, population pressures, natural and environmental degradation and other non-climatic causes.

OFDA recognizes that these significant trends and region-specific concerns interact in complex ways that create unique challenges. Although OFDA has witnessed an improvement in some Asian nations’ disaster management capacities in recent years, capacity needs and gaps exist throughout the region.

## Regional Assumptions

- Host government capacity to respond to disasters varies and will require diverse DRR approaches;
- Regional institutions will continue to play a major role in DRR activities;
- The growing interest of the U.S. military in humanitarian assistance and response in the region will affect OFDA’s staffing and resource allocation;
- Vulnerability to climate variability and change will remain high in the region;

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<sup>1</sup> The OFDA Asia Region includes countries extending eastward from Pakistan and including South, Southeast, and East Asia as follows: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, China, East Timor, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam. Also included are Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Island nations of the Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Western Samoa.

<sup>2</sup> According to the United Nations Population Fund, 14 of the world’s 23 largest cities will be in Asia by the year 2015.

<sup>3</sup> International Water Management Institute, Global Water Scarcity Study.

<sup>4</sup> IFRC 2007 World Disaster Report

- The current global economic downturn will reduce resilience to hazards; and
- Fresh water will continue to be a limited resource with the potential to cause conflict.

## Regional Constraints

- Large geographic size and long travel distances limit U.S.-based response capabilities stressing enhanced local or regional responses;
- Humanitarian access and USG policy affect OFDA's programming particularly in conflict-prone areas;
- Limited information and data sharing among institutions present challenges to disaster preparedness and mitigation;
- Lack of medium- to long-term commitment from donor organizations limits promotion of sustainable disaster preparedness and mitigation; and
- Competing interests and strategies among multiple actors limit a unified approach to DRR.

## Priority Program Selection

This strategy capitalizes on present OFDA activities addressing DRR in Asia and focuses on the OFDA risk reduction principles of preparedness and mitigation. These principles provide the structure for the goals, sectors, and activities, allow for precise program prioritization, and serve as guidance for future country plan selection. The Asia team builds in resources to ensure program evaluations are complete and requires a monitoring and evaluation plan from each implementing partner.

Based on the principles identified above, this strategy prioritizes two OFDA technical sectors: Natural and Technological Risks, and Protection. Additional needs in other OFDA sectors may require targeted assistance, but the sectors mentioned above will actuate the major program decisions described in this strategy. Circumstances might compel OFDA to conduct specific one-time activities or quick impact projects as needs arise, but OFDA does not plan to program against the other OFDA sectors.

OFDA's Crisis Response (see box at right) options will continue to encompass the full spectrum of OFDA technical sectors as required in a response situation and as such is not the focus of this strategy.

## Goals

Two goals will guide OFDA activities in the Asia region for the 2009-2011 strategic period:

1. Improve national and regional capacities for disaster risk reduction and response.
2. Increase and strengthen the resiliency of vulnerable populations to prepare for and recover from disasters.

### OFDA Response

**The Regional Office will serve OFDA as the region's point of contact for response to disaster events.**

**As such, OFDA provides:**

- **Emergency response capabilities and technical assistance through damage and needs assessments, relief actions and Disaster Assistance Response Teams (DART); and**
- **Relief commodities, services, transportation support, grants to relief organizations, technical assistance, or any combination thereof.**

**OFDA Field Operations Guide (FOG) - 2005**

## **Goal 1: Improve national and regional capacities for disaster risk reduction and response.**

### **Explanation**

Considerable regional capacity and resources exist in Asia and OFDA will continue to invest in building the capacity of regional institutions and in the training of national personnel. OFDA programs in disaster-prone countries demonstrate the investment in institutional capacity to improve search and rescue, first responder, and mass casualty aptitude and can help achieve sustainable national disaster management capabilities. Several Asian countries have transitioned from beneficiary-nation status to donor-nation status regionally. These new donor resources provide additional options for OFDA to leverage its resources, strengthen trans-boundary and regional collaboration, and increase geographic and technical scope. OFDA also understands the importance of regional outreach and best practice tools designed to ensure that U.S. embassy, military, and USAID mission personnel understand fully the OFDA approach to disaster management and the responsibilities each has under emergency conditions.

### **I. Principle: Mitigation and Preparedness**

#### **I.1 OFDA Technical Sector: Natural and Technological Risk**

**I.1.1 Activity – Trans-boundary hydrometeorological initiatives (Mitigation):** OFDA will implement natural disaster mitigation activities in Asia through a trans-boundary and integrated, hydrometeorological mitigation approach. Activities will focus on technical strengthening of national and regional institutions through capacity building and training. Other efforts will continue to promote regional cooperation, forums, early warning systems and risk reduction strategy development, and programming that provides technical expertise, grants, and encourages trans-boundary information and data sharing.

**I.1.2 Activity – Training of trainers (Preparedness):** OFDA will continue to emphasize training of trainers as a key model for developing national and regional expertise that support indigenous urban search and rescue, hospital mass casualty, and medical first responder capacities.

**I.1.3 Activity – Regional institution capacity building (Preparedness):** OFDA will continue to work closely with regional institutions that broaden outreach and increase impact. Programs that increase Asian government and regional institution capacity to manage disasters and provide support to neighboring countries will continue through the promotion of structures such as the Incident Command System and activities such as collapsed structure search and rescue training.

**I.1.4 Activity – Development of public/private partnership (Preparedness):** OFDA has successfully promoted private sector roles in disaster assistance that demonstrate the potential for additional public/private partnership relationships. OFDA will continue to explore opportunities to work with the private sector and raise awareness of public and private sector partnerships for further investment in disaster risk reduction.

**I.1.5 Activity – Promote national and regional seismic risk reduction programs (Preparedness and Mitigation):** Rapid urbanization without proper urban planning, building codes, enforcement of codes, and other disaster preparedness and mitigation measures increase the impact of seismic events. OFDA will continue to support selective earthquake preparedness for first responders and other key personnel, develop school curricula, raise awareness among government officials, and strengthen technical capacity of local universities and professional societies.

## **1.2 OFDA Technical Sector: Protection**

**1.2.1 Activity – Capacity-building and awareness:** OFDA recognizes the need to promote awareness and understanding of protection issues in disaster risk reduction, as well as in emergency response, and supports activities that train humanitarian responders to integrate protection concerns into program design.

**1.2.2 Activity – Psychosocial training and research:** OFDA recognizes the need for further research to explore appropriate psychosocial interventions during or following crises and supports initiatives that enhance and improve mental health support in the Asia context.

**Goal 2: Increase and strengthen the resiliency of vulnerable populations to prepare for and recover from disasters.**

### **Explanation**

OFDA will continue to provide relief assistance in the Asia region, but recognizes the need to invest in the local preparedness and recovery capacity of vulnerable communities for sustainable results. OFDA's experience demonstrates that support to well-placed international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local, community-based organizations present in disaster-prone areas are appropriate. OFDA views Local Response Network (LRN) mechanisms as credible approaches, using local stockpiles of non-food relief items, local partner training and capacity building, and small grants for rapid response capabilities.

## **2. Principles: Mitigation and Preparedness**

### **1.2 OFDA Technical Sector: Natural and Technological Risk**

**2.1.1. Activity – Community-based capacity building (Preparedness):** Complementary to its regional capacity strengthening programs, OFDA recognizes that communities are the first responders to the disasters that strike them and understands the importance of building capacity for an effective initial response. Developing plans and building the capacity to act as first responders at the community level are vital components of the DRR strategy.

**2.1.2 Activity – Promote community-based seismic risk reduction programs: (Preparedness and Mitigation):** OFDA will continue to support critical earthquake preparedness training, local school curriculum development, local awareness development among government officials, and building technical capacity through support to local NGOs in highly vulnerable areas. OFDA will consider support of technical expertise on improved engineering and construction techniques, including school retrofitting.<sup>5</sup>

**2.1.3 Activity - Information dissemination and local warning systems (Preparedness):** OFDA understands that effective early warnings save lives. OFDA will consider cost-effective, simple information dissemination techniques and early warning systems for local authorities and populations at risk.

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<sup>5</sup> OFDA pioneered school earthquake safety and retrofitting in 1995 through the OFDA-funded Asian Urban Disaster Mitigation Program. The United Nations and international community accept the technique as a viable intervention for seismic risk reduction.

#### **2.1.4 Activity – Relief commodity pre-positioning (Preparedness):**

Frequent, small-scale disasters in aggregate affect more people and cause more economic damage than less frequent, large-scale disasters. Asia's geographic vastness and limited transportation capacity can generate time-consuming logistical challenges for OFDA commodity distributions. Simple pre-positioning and management of appropriate relief commodities for disaster-prone communities provide timely relief and build community relief capacity.

**2.1.5 Activity – Water management practices (Mitigation):** Water scarcity in the face of competing demands for food production, domestic, industrial, energy, and environmental purposes reduces community resilience to disasters. OFDA will increase community resilience to droughts and water scarcity through programs that promote efficient water management practices such as water harvesting and water conservation.

**2.1.6 Activity – Increased community resiliency (Mitigation):** OFDA will continue to increase community resilience to climate variability and change through transfer of knowledge and lessons learned from disaster mitigation experiences such as community-based flash flood management, community-based drought management, and flood-proofing structures.