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I. DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

BACKGROUND

For the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), 1985 was a critical year in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region. Following a major earthquake in Chile on March 3, twin earthquakes on September 19 and 20 in Mexico City devastated central zones. Less than two months later, the Nevado del Ruiz volcano in Colombia erupted on November 13, and a lahar, or heated mudflow, caused the total destruction of the city of Armero.

These three events alone left more than 30,000 people dead (unofficial figures estimate total casualties as high as 40,000) and one million homeless. The fact that all three disasters occurred within a nine-month span had a cumulative psychological impact throughout the Western Hemisphere.

In December 1985, OFDA/Washington responded by establishing a three-person Regional Team in the LAC region based at the USAID Mission in San José, Costa Rica. A fourth member joined the team in 1987, and today the LAC Regional Team has grown to five full-time professionals and 16 full-time consultants. By launching the team, OFDA/Washington aimed to ensure that the United States Government (USG) had a continuous and regionally sensitive presence in the LAC region to (1) respond to disasters and coordinate USG relief efforts in a timely and effective manner, and (2) promote disaster prevention, mitigation, and preparedness.

In 1989, the OFDA/LAC Regional Team, with the support of OFDA/Washington under the Prevention, Mitigation, and Preparedness (PMP) program, initiated the development of the multi-course OFDA/LAC Risk Management Training Program (RMTP). OFDA/LAC made the decision to establish the program based on constraints observed in the institutional capacity to respond to disasters and on hazard assessments made throughout the region.

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY OF THE TRAINING PROGRAM

The long-term objective of the RMTP is to assist national disaster management organizations to achieve self-sufficiency in disaster response as well as prevention, mitigation, and preparedness. The strategy is to strengthen the national emergency and related organizations internally and to improve their capacity to respond to disasters, thereby increasing their profile and credibility within their own governmental structures. For the U.S. Government, the anticipated outcome of the program was a reduction in the need for large-scale USG relief assistance in the aftermath of disasters in the LAC region.

The objectives, strategy, and assumptions of the RMTP are summarized below.

Summary of the Risk Management Training Program (RMTP)

Goals and Objectives:

- Assist national disaster management organizations to achieve self-sufficiency
- Reduce the need for large-scale USG disaster relief assistance
- Strengthen the profile, credibility, and capacity of national disaster management organizations

Strategies/Tactics:

- Train and “professionalize” national emergency organization staff
- Develop training curricula and methodology but emphasize “national” ownership
- Develop courses based on the interactive method and team-building

Critical Assumptions:

- Receptivity on behalf of national emergency organization staff
- Eventual transfer of ownership and responsibility to the national level

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR DISASTER RESPONSE

Many of the issues related to natural disaster mitigation and management overlap among the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Caribbean and Central America are notoriously vulnerable to hurricanes and earthquakes. Countries situated along the Sierra Madre-Andean spine have long faced the danger of volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and landslides. El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) events affect countries throughout the region. In addition to sharing environmental and climatic threats, many of the countries have a common language, heritage and similar customs, all of which facilitate cooperation and understanding in disaster management. Thus, there is an obvious need in Latin America and the Caribbean to address natural disaster response at the regional level.

However, building a regional capacity to respond must begin at the national level, since national emergency institutions form the basis for a broader regional structure. Without strong national bodies, regional associations lack direction, leadership, and experience. **Ultimately, disaster management and response are sovereign concerns that are carried out at the national level.** Even when collaboration among nations occurs, the government of the affected country administers and executes the disaster mitigation or response plan.

With this in mind, OFDA/LAC established the RMTP to increase the self-sufficiency and capability of institutions at the national level, and in this sense the RMTP is not a regional program geared specifically towards regional action. Instead, the program seeks to **strengthen national capacity while at the same time fostering those elements that allow for regional cooperation:** formation of strong networks and interpersonal relationships at the institutional level, information sharing and exchange, and good will

among national participants. It is important to note that, as a binational agency, OFDA/LAC can promote regional collaboration through meetings and training, but it does not have a mechanism to ensure or mandate such cooperation.

DESIRED OUTCOMES AND DELIVERABLES GENERATED

In developing the training program, OFDA/LAC concluded that the key to achieving enhanced national disaster management in the region (and therefore a diminished USG relief role) was to strengthen existing national emergency organizations and that sustainable change had to come from within. Therefore, the OFDA/LAC team recognized that better trained technical and operational personnel in the national emergency and related organizations, where personnel turnover was presumably lower than at the level of political appointees, were in the best position to implement change and foster improvement in those organizations.

To initiate the program, OFDA/LAC convened a representative group from countries in the region for a two-day discussion to solicit recommendations on training methodology, course subject matter, curricula, target audience, and mechanisms to ensure “buy-in” on behalf of the countries in the region. Participants included representatives from national emergency organizations, NGOs, international organizations, and bilateral funding agencies.

OFDA/LAC placed a high priority on sustainability, which could only be guaranteed if countries made a firm commitment to participate. The team also concluded that “exchange and interchange” were essential elements in the design of the program, given the various levels of economic and human resources in the countries.

At the outset, OFDA/LAC identified several “desired outcomes” (deliverables):

- **A standard training methodology** for use throughout the program. OFDA/LAC uses the “Performance-Based Interactive” methodology developed by Robert F. Mager, a world-renowned expert in adult learning. Most of the Mager materials have been published in Spanish.
- **A sufficient number of certified instructors** in each country to meet local demands for training.
- **A standard “Course Coordinator’s Manual”** to ensure the uniform organization and implementation of courses, regardless of location.
- **Official “Lesson Plans”** for the instructors in each course to guarantee uniformity and quality control.
- **A “train the trainer” approach** based on a methodology emphasizing interactive learning and the setting of goals, objectives, and measurement criteria.

- **Development and testing (at least three times) of course materials by qualified nationals** in the region before official approval and launch. OFDA/LAC controls all course materials to prevent modifications that might “dilute” or weaken their quality.
- **A standard “design and development” process** for the courses to maintain quality control of material content, style, and presentation.
- **Inclusion of participants from other sectors, agencies, and NGOs**, regardless of the method of organization and finance, whenever possible.
- **Required completion of the basic “Training for Instructors” course** by potential instructors, in addition to the course for which they would be certified as instructors and the “Trainers Workshop” for that course. OFDA/LAC certifies only those instructors who successfully complete the above process.
- **Organization and finance of a sufficient number of regional courses and workshops** by OFDA/LAC in order to establish an adequate pool of certified instructors.
- **Financing of the first “national” offering of each content course** by OFDA/LAC, in addition to the regional courses and workshops.

IMPACT OF OFDA/LAC TRAINING ON NATIONAL POLICIES

The concept of “Comprehensive Disaster Management” was not widely understood or utilized in the region prior to 1990. Following World War II, the U.S. adapted the “Civil Defense” model that had been developed in Great Britain during the “Blitz” (German bombing of London). None of the countries in the LAC region had an official “disaster response” agency or organization before 1960. Between 1960 and 1980, some of the countries in the region copied the Civil Defense model, which focused exclusively on “disaster response.” Similarly, the Red Cross Societies in the region were historically focused on “disaster relief.”

Prior to the early 1980s, the relationship between disasters and development was little understood. Therefore, most countries used the Civil Defense model and the Red Cross “disaster relief” model to respond to natural disasters. As a result, terms such as “preparedness, mitigation, and prevention” were generally excluded from discussions on disaster management. Furthermore, due to the infrequency of serious natural disasters, most personnel appointed to Civil Defense positions lacked knowledge and training in disaster management. Governments did not assign a high priority to budget allocations for disasters, and those appointed to leading positions in the agencies rarely had influence on significant policy issues. However, after the 1976 Guatemala earthquake, some leaders in the “disaster” field began to understand the relationship between disasters and

development and to recognize that preparedness, mitigation, and prevention initiatives would indeed reduce economic losses, as well as the loss of lives.

OFDA/LAC developed the RMTP in response to the lack of appropriate university training in disaster management as a profession. **The purpose of the program was to provide participants with training in disaster management to allow them to act as “agents of change” at the local level.** As a catalyst for change, the program aimed to directly or indirectly influence a number of significant areas:

- **Legislation:** Many countries needed to enact new or revised legislation that would give increased recognition, power and authority to their national emergency organization.
- **Land-use management:** The more advanced countries needed to authorize or mandate their national emergency organization to have the authority to assess vulnerability and risk of areas deemed to be vulnerable, and to have some degree of control over the types of construction or development permitted in those areas.
- **Building codes:** Several countries needed to modernize their building codes and assign the authority to enforce the codes.
- **Human resources:** Almost every national emergency organization in the region needed to increase staff by 25 to 125%, with well-trained professionals with multi-disciplinary skills.
- **Budgets:** With better-qualified staff, national disaster organizations could leverage much larger annual operating budgets.
- **Image and public opinion:** Whereas national disaster organizations were once almost invisible, the general public needed to recognize their existence and be able to depend on them for early warning, advice, and rapid response.

IMPACT OF OFDA/LAC TRAINING ON REGIONAL COLLABORATION

By bringing together national participants and increasing their awareness of regional concerns, the RMTP has indirectly generated a number of regional benefits and collaborative activities, including inter-organizational learning, exchange of instructors, exchange of emergency personnel, standardization of language, customs, and practices, and reinforcement of regional program coordination. These activities are described in detail below.

Inter-Organizational Learning

The RMTP program has increased national emergency organizations’ awareness of common information needs and regional concerns. In many cases, this has led to exchange of common meteorological and seismological data. The training has also

allowed participants to exchange valuable knowledge of previous experiences and successful disaster response practices.

Exchange of Instructors

Another regional linkage formed in response to the training has been the exchange of instructors among countries. Several countries offer space to participants from neighboring countries to participate in national-level training courses. OFDA/LAC supports this type of exchange by paying for transportation costs, while the host country assumes the room and board costs. This type of collaboration promotes cooperation among nations, establishes familiarity among participants, and facilitates information sharing among national emergency organizations.

Exchange of Emergency Personnel

Over the years, the RMTP program has fostered strong networks among emergency organizations that national institutions can call on during a response effort. The results of this regional network were visible during the post-Mitch reconstruction in Central America. When organizations or agencies sought persons with specific skills, they had the necessary contacts to look to neighboring countries, if they were not available locally. Following the 2001 earthquake in El Salvador, many neighboring countries offered assistance and sent emergency personnel to El Salvador. In this case, numerous countries participated in the relief effort (though all under the instruction and leadership of the Government of El Salvador). The fact that personnel not only knew each other, but also shared a common terminology and methodology, was a great advantage during the response.

Standardization of Language, Customs, and Practices

Another outcome of the training program has been the establishment of uniform terminology, methodology, and mechanisms. Different idiomatic expressions among countries can hinder cooperation efforts and prevent understanding during a relief effort. The standard terminology used in the training courses provides emergency personnel with a common “language” to communicate at the regional level. In addition, the standard methodologies and disaster response mechanisms taught in the training courses ensure common understanding of disaster response protocol.

Reinforcement of Regional Program Coordination

Although credit cannot be directly attributed to the training program, the wide OFDA network that has evolved through the RMTP has reinforced regional program coordination, especially in Central America, through the Coordination Center for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America (CEPREDENAC). CEPREDENAC is a regional organization formed in 1988 to strengthen the capacity of the region as a whole to reduce the vulnerability of the population to natural disasters. The Governments of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama are members of the organization. CEPREDENAC is part of SICA, the Central America Integration System, which supports development efforts in the region.

The OFDA/LAC training program and CEPREDENAC both share the common goal of promoting regional cooperation and exchange of information, experience, technical and technological advice. However, while CEPREDENAC legally mandates participating governments to adhere to its constitution, OFDA/LAC has no such agreement.

PROGRAM INNOVATION

A natural evolution in the training program has been a shift in emphasis from “Disaster Management,” which focuses on the four basic pillars of management (planning, organizing, leading, and control) to “Risk Management Training” (Gestión de Riesgos). The latter underscores three major points: (1) a better understanding of hazards and their causes and effects; (2) analysis of vulnerability; and (3) assessment of risk. This modification has not reduced the importance of sound management of all aspects of the disaster cycle, but stresses the importance of measures to reduce losses.

II. CHALLENGES

PARTNERSHIPS

OFDA/LAC has maintained close relationships with several major partners: (1) national emergency organizations; (2) international organizations such as PAHO, OAS, and CEPREDENAC; (3) key host-government ministries, such as health and public works; (4) national and local fire services; and (5) NGOs, such as the Red Cross, World Vision, CARE, and Save the Children.

These partnerships include: interchange of instructors, invitations to send participants to courses, provision of training materials at no cost, and inclusion of NGO participants. By incorporating instructors and participants from all agencies and organizations involved in pre-and post-impact emergency management, including government agencies, NGOs, and civil society/private entities, the program aims to break down organizational and sectoral barriers.

The more than 10-year history of the RMTP has provided training to more than 30,000 participants in the region. This long and extensive history and large constituency provide OFDA with credibility that enables it to influence the focus, financing and visibility of the national organizations.

CHALLENGES OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

Since disaster response inevitably occurs primarily at the national level, there is an **inherent tension between efforts to strengthen both national and regional institutional capabilities**. OFDA/LAC has utilized this “competitiveness” among nations as a means to heighten the visibility and importance of disaster management at the national level. At the same time, OFDA/LAC has striven to increase cooperation among nations to respond at a regional level. However, because of the necessity to maintain responsibility for disaster response at the national level, there are some intrinsic limitations in building a formal regional framework.

STRENGTHENING PARTNERS’ VOICES

The regional approach in the OFDA/LAC training program has facilitated extensive cooperation among countries, and has enabled “weaker” countries to obtain assistance from “stronger” neighbors. This has been demonstrated by the willingness of “strong” countries to invite participants from neighboring countries to participate in national events. In such cases, the sending country pays for transportation to and from the event, and the host country provides room and board at no cost to the sending country.

ESTABLISHING PRIORITIES

Since the objective of the RMTP is to assist national disaster management organizations to achieve self-sufficiency, OFDA/LAC’s priority is at the national level. As indicated

previously, though, there is the expectation that regional collaboration will emerge as a natural outcome of the process.

In setting priorities among different countries for the initial courses, the primary concern was to ensure the training program's success. Therefore, the team identified those countries that had already expressed interest in Disaster Management Training and had sufficient institutional resources to host some of the initial courses. Now that the countries of the region have assumed full responsibility for national level implementation of the training program, OFDA/LAC's priority is to inform Certified Instructors of changes in the training materials and the development of new courses.

FINANCING AND SUSTAINABILITY

OFDA/LAC provided almost all of the financial support during the period in which emphasis was placed on instructor training and course development. Subsequently, OFDA/LAC continued to finance regional courses for trainers in order to establish an adequate pool of certified instructors.

In addition to the regional courses and workshops, OFDA/LAC financed the first "national" offering of each content course. OFDA/LAC also paid for travel and per diem for instructors from neighboring countries for additional courses until a country had sufficient local instructors. At this point, national organizations assumed all training costs.

A critical assumption for the RMTP was that host country governments and agencies would eventually assume ownership and responsibility for the training courses. An analysis of the financial support for the training program over the past ten years shows that OFDA/LAC's input decreased each year. In fact, over the last four years, the countries have invested significantly more in the program than OFDA. The countries in the region currently finance all national-level courses, while OFDA/LAC's primary costs are in course development, updating, and instructor workshops. This indicates that significant transfer of responsibility and ownership to the national level has occurred.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

From the onset of the training program, OFDA/LAC decided to implement a permanent evaluation process. Dr. Richard Olson, a well-known and experienced researcher of disasters in Latin America, was retained to design and implement the monitoring and evaluation process, which he has continued to do for OFDA/LAC. Dr. Olson has established a formal evaluation framework based on four levels of assessment:

- 1. Participant Reaction:** Assesses participants' level of satisfaction with the training experience on the final day of the course.

2. Participant Learning: Focuses on the achievement of skill and knowledge objectives. The usual measures include end-of-course examinations and/or instructor grades.

3. Participant Behavioral (“On-The-Job”) Changes: Focuses on post-training changes when participants return to their jobs. Evaluation at this level assesses changes in actual on-the-job performance or transfer of learning to the job setting.

4. Organizational results: Determines if performance improvements are discernible at the organizational level, in addition to the individual level.

To evaluate Participant Behavioral Changes, Dr. Olson has visited organizations and interviewed participants’ supervisors. He has also visited countries immediately following a disaster to compare the performance of those who had received the training with those who had not, and to assess performance improvements at the organizational level.

As the training program has evolved, two unexpected benefits to participants have become evident. First, participants have acquired and developed a number of professional skills. Because the training courses require that participants develop objectives and make presentations, participants become more assertive, more comfortable speaking in public, and more effective in their role in the workplace. Secondly, graduates return to the workplace with a much broader understanding of the disaster cycle and its effects within the context of development.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Strong national institutions are the building blocks of a regional framework for disaster response. In the process of strengthening national capacities to prevent, mitigate and respond to disasters, greater regional cooperation and understanding emerge as a natural by-product.

Sustainability is directly related to ownership. If the countries have a significant role in the selection of the areas and skills that require training and in the development of course materials, and if the course content, materials, and instruction are of high quality, countries will be willing to invest money and human resources to continue the program.