

## **89. CONSEQUENCE MANAGEMENT: A DUAL APPROACH**

Michelle Jennings

Agency for International Development/Bureau for Humanitarian Response

Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance

Washington D.C., USA

### **INTRODUCTION**

The U.S. Agency for International Development /Bureau for Humanitarian Response/Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/BHR/OFDA) is responsible for providing non-food, humanitarian assistance in response to international crises and disasters. The USAID Administrator is designated as the President's Special Coordinator for International Disaster Assistance, and OFDA has the responsibility to coordinate the USG's response to humanitarian emergencies and disasters abroad.

OFDA provides humanitarian assistance in response to a declaration of a foreign disaster made by the U.S. Ambassador or the U.S. Department of State. Once an event or situation is determined to require U.S. Government (USG) assistance, OFDA can immediately provide up to \$25,000 to the U.S. Embassy or USAID Mission to purchase relief supplies locally or give a contribution to a relief organization in the affected country. OFDA can also send its own relief commodities, such as plastic sheeting, tents, and water purification units, from one of its four stockpiles located in Italy, Guam, Honduras, and the U.S. Increasingly, OFDA deploys short-or long-term field personnel to countries where disasters are occurring or threaten to occur, and in some cases, dispatches a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) to help manage the disaster or event for the U.S. Ambassador and Country Team.

The largest percentage of BHR/OFDA's assistance goes to relief and rehabilitation project grants managed by Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and International Organizations (IOs). Relief projects include airlifting relief supplies to affected populations in remote locations, managing primary health care and supplementary feeding centers, and providing shelter materials to disaster evacuees and displaced persons. A rehabilitation project might immunize dislocated populations against disease, provide seeds and tools to farmers who have been affected by disasters, or drill wells or rehabilitate water systems in drought-stricken countries. OFDA carefully monitors the organizations implementing these projects to ensure that resources are used wisely and to determine if the project needs to be adapted to changing conditions. The goal of each project is to meet the humanitarian needs of the affected population, with the aim of returning the population to self-sufficiency.

The "notwithstanding" clause of Section 491 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 states that no statutory or regulatory requirements shall restrict OFDA's ability to respond to the needs of disaster victims in a timely fashion. OFDA follows the standard USAID procedures for routine procurements, but utilizes expedited or modified procedures when necessary to achieve its disaster response objectives. The first principle in disaster response accountability is to ensure that appropriate assistance gets to the neediest victims in time to minimize death and suffering. Procurement and accounting procedures may be expedited, but must include effective systems of internal control.

Not all of OFDA's assistance goes to providing aid in response to disasters. OFDA's mitigation staff oversees a portfolio of projects designed to reduce the impact of disasters on victims and economic assets in disaster-prone countries. During the last several years, BHR/OFDA has invested in a number of programs in partnership with the U.S. Geological

Survey (USGS), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, the World Environment Center, and other offices within USAID. These programs not only enhance a country's capacity to manage its own disasters and hazards, but also promote the transfer of technology, goods, and services between the U.S. and the host country. OFDA mitigation-related programs range from investing in drought early warning systems that can possibly head off a famine to training local relief workers to manage the response to a disaster more effectively. OFDA is increasingly investing in programs designed to prevent, mitigate, prepare, and plan for complex emergencies, which are more the result of human actions than of acts of nature.

The decade of the 1990's presented OFDA with new challenges to its mandate of saving lives, alleviating human suffering, and reducing the economic impact of disasters. 1998's unprecedented year of international humanitarian emergencies continued into FY 1999/2000 with the devastation of an earthquake in Turkey, the widespread destruction from Hurricane Mitch in Central America, the shelter crisis due to civil strife in Kosovo, the flooding disaster in Mozambique, and the drought and civil conflict in the Horn of Africa.

An increase in highly visible, conflict-related, complex emergencies such as those in Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Rwanda, and the former Yugoslavia have consumed the bulk of international humanitarian resources over the past decade. In addition, vulnerability to natural disasters is greater than ever, due to factors such as population growth and environmental degradation. In response to these changes, OFDA has adopted new programming and response capabilities. Its mission represents a reshaped approach to humanitarian relief. The last few years of OFDA involvement illustrates that in any humanitarian disaster OFDA may find itself functioning as a donor, a coordinator, and even an implementer of disaster response.



**A widowed IDP mother prepares food for her child in the village of Thiet, Lakes Region of southern Sudan. BHR/OFDA funded a WVUS program that provided non-food relief items to the IDPs, including the cooking pot (photo by Ted Maly, BHR/OFDA).**

While OFDA has traditionally viewed itself as functioning with immediate and short-term response capability to humanitarian disasters and providing basic necessities to affected populations, the Office also recognizes the importance of incorporating mitigation techniques into its response activity whenever possible. Mitigation techniques are those designed to

reduce the number of lives lost and amount of property damaged from natural and complex disasters. The unique nature of OFDA's role in disaster provides the Office with an opportunity for strategic response planning in an effort to minimize the impact of future disasters. Throughout the year, BHR/OFDA uses its position as a key player in the international humanitarian relief community to make mitigation an integral part of emergency response.

#### **'A DUAL APPROACH'**

OFDA responds to humanitarian crisis, natural and/or technological disasters worldwide on a continuing basis and, as directed by Presidential Decision Directive 39/62, will similarly respond to the consequences of a terrorist event, in support of a host nation through the U.S. Ambassador. OFDA recognizes the imperative to prepare and plan for the consequences of a potential terrorist WMD attack, however infrequent, by drawing upon the past experience and expertise gained from years of humanitarian response operations.

OFDA has developed a *'dual approach'*, to assist an affected population victimized by terrorism or a technological emergency, such as a hazardous materials release as the result of a flood or earthquake. Through interagency relationships that give OFDA access to expertise from U.S. Public Health Service's Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), OFDA is developing a response capability for these unique events. This capability includes a training program, reference materials and consultation, and access to expert advice and/or assessment missions for any type of consequence management event, be it caused by human error or intentional malice.

OFDA understands that a catastrophic terrorist or technological event, like many humanitarian emergencies that will overwhelm a nation, will require the resources of many nations and organizations. OFDA hopes to draw upon the experience of natural disaster and humanitarian complex emergency response, fortified by consequence management plans and interagency preparedness measures, to be equally prepared for the unimaginable.