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BHM, International

Final Report to the Office of U S Foreign Disaster Assistance

on Completion of Technical Support Contract

-- AFR-1520-C-00-1128-00

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Introduction

BHM International's (BHM) final report on its contract with the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) A/R 1520 C-00 1128 00 includes the following elements:

- a brief summary of results achieved
- unfinished work
- methods utilized
- synthesis of lessons learned and
- final recommendations

Results Achieved

Results achieved under the subject contract fall generally under the following headings:

- improved proposal design and review process
- improved design of disaster assistance strategies and approaches
- improved grantee periodic reporting and
- greater use of monitoring in decision making

PMP benefited from support under the contract in managing its relationship with its grantees. Results included improved design of grants and strategies that informed those grants. A series of lessons learned were presented to increase the possibility of use by grantees of the Agency managing for results orientation. Reporting by grantees to PMP improved, fulfilling the Agency's performance reporting requirements. Finally, PMP incorporated evaluation and monitoring into its management process.

Vehicles for achieving the above consisted of some 26 evaluations, 6 special studies, training workshops and continuous consultations with PMP grantees. BHM also participated in Office-wide review and contributions to OFDA's strategies. Its support of DRD in carrying out evaluations of complex humanitarian emergencies in Southern Sudan, Northern Iraq and Angola contributed to lessons learned on strategic design, implementation, especially in developing baselines, targets, and measurable results, and in promoting the need for continuous monitoring and evaluation of increasingly time-consuming and expensive responses.

Unfinished Work

BHM did not fully complete its final complex humanitarian emergency (CHE) evaluation of Angola. Briefings were held to present findings, recommendations and lessons learned from that evaluation, but its completion in final report form awaits another mechanism. A report on the impact of humanitarian relief on the environment was also not completed due to early completion of the subject contract.

On a higher level, while it was not BHM's mandate to support OFDA's move to a managing for results orientation, it did succeed in imparting that orientation to the PMP Division but not to the entire Office. In fact, it remains a question within OFDA whether the emergency response effort is even susceptible to such an orientation. It was BHM's thinking that good monitoring and evaluation of DRD's activities would have gone a long way to fulfilling that expectation. This remains to be seen.

Methods Utilized

BIIM's approach to its work with OI/DA consisted of carrying out a series of evaluations and special studies of PMP followed by DRD activities. These evaluations and studies were carried out by teams which were provided with detailed scopes of work and team building support. Briefings were provided by most returning teams, reports reviewed by OI/DA management then disseminated to appropriate recipients.

Work with grantees was provided through technical consultations for design, monitoring and performance reporting. This was usually delivered to the grantees on their sites.

One technique used to disseminate the results of some of the evaluations was the development and production of an OFDA Evaluation Bulletin. Another was the preparation of a draft OFDA Monitoring and Evaluation Manual, which summarized and synthesized findings, lessons learned, and recommendations from all the completed evaluations and special studies. BIIM also supported OFDA in reviewing grantee proposals for relief.

Synthesis of Lessons Learned and Final Recommendations - -

The remainder of the report is devoted to lessons learned and recommendations. These are organized along lines of PMP (prevention, mitigation, and preparedness) and response.

DISASTER RESPONSE

Four evaluations support the synthesis in this area. These include analysis of the response to the sudden onset disasters in Limon, Costa Rica (earthquake - 1991), Nicaragua (tsunami - 1992), Indonesia (earthquake/tsunami - 1992), and the slow onset drought in Southern Africa (1991-92).

1 Preparedness is critical to a timely and effective response

The benefits of preparedness were most evident in OFDA's response to disasters in the LAC region. In both Costa Rica and Nicaragua, OFDA was able to quickly respond with relief supplies because of the Southcom stockpile and rapid assessments of survivor needs done by regional advisors. In comparison, it took over two weeks to get similar supplies to Indonesia. The Regional Advisor, based in Costa Rica, significantly strengthened the OFDA response capacity. USAID missions were generally found to be less well prepared. Mission disaster plans were often out of date and the designee in the position of Mission Disaster Relief Officer (MDRO) usually lacked training and standard operating procedures which would guide his/her role in the response. While disaster management expertise is defined as an important element of a designated USAID official's scope of work, the MDRO position is most often perceived as one additive among many to an officer's long list of responsibilities. As a result, missions tend to rely upon regional advisors and regional offices for important services during the emergency phase of a disaster and are thus not usually fully prepared themselves.

2 Accurate and reliable assessments are critical to appropriate response

Assessments critically inform the response. In Nicaragua, political considerations coupled with humanitarian concerns prompted a response before an assessment could substantiate need, resulting in excessive relief supplies. Major disasters often inspire a variety of assessments. U.S. assistance decisions are not systematically coordinated, e.g. sharing assessments and coordinating relief distribution, with other actors in the international humanitarian assistance arena. Protocols requiring on-site confirmation of needs from government authorities, NGOs and other reliable assistance partners like the Red Cross are not available. Assessments often fail to specify how relief needs will be used and how aid could be made more appropriate for end users, e.g. pre-cutting plastic sheeting instead of distributing it as uncut rolls.

Assessments did not routinely include a determination of logistical constraints that could inhibit aid being delivered in a timely manner. When the disaster is in a remote area it may be more expeditious to purchase supplies in local markets (when available). In the Indonesian case, relief supplies arrived after the emergency period and most survivors had already met their emergency needs. Assessments may be difficult to conduct from a logistical standpoint and, furthermore, may suffer from an absence of unreliable information. In addition, targets are not defined in a sufficiently flexible manner to allow implementing organizations to be responsive to new or better information or changing conditions.

3 Relief can promote development

Disaster response and emergency assistance can promote rehabilitation and, in some cases, long-term development. The recovery period of a disaster is a fruitful time in which positive changes can be introduced to further mitigation and preparedness or stem the tide of a continuing or recurrent slow onset event. In the response to the Southern Africa drought, new well creation and well rehabilitation were both an effective emergency response and contributed to rehabilitation and aspects of long term development. Administrative barriers sometimes impede relief that aids development and assistance fails to accommodate the relief to development process. Again in Southern Africa, the division into emergency and development projects was artificial resulting in unnecessary administrative impediments. In Nicaragua, emergency funds were effectively used to promote recovery of the damaged fishing industry. Further, community involvement in relief programs can reduce costs, build community strengths, and increase the likelihood that rehabilitation and mitigation can be sustainable.

4 The need for a timely response may require bypassing local and national authorities

Relying on national and local authorities resulted in significant delays in delivery of relief supplies to affected areas in Costa Rica, Indonesia and Nicaragua. This situation is likely to repeat itself when the government is unstable or the national disaster staff are inadequately trained or disorganized. Assistance would have been more effective if relief supplies could have been delivered directly to the affected areas. Despite long term efforts to build the capacity of local institutions, in an emergency situation the needs of survivors take precedence over institution building goals. For example, despite OFDA/LAC's support of Costa Rica's National Emergency Commission (NEC), NEC was unable to overcome management and political constraints contributing to limited effectiveness in the response. Government ministries are prone to political influence and have high turnover rates in key personnel thus limiting their dependability.

5 The OFDA goal of "saving lives" often did not apply to response situations

Evaluations determined that the goal of "saving lives", while laudable, was often not an appropriate goal. This was primarily the result of the occurrence of disasters in relatively benign climactic conditions. In such climates, relief clearly reduced human suffering but did not save lives. At the same time, delays in approving emergency assistance and in delivering relief goods raises concern that assistance may not be deliverable in a sufficiently timely manner to achieve the goal of saving lives even when that goal is appropriate.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Nine evaluations were used to develop the synthesis in this area. These included assessments of two regional training programs in Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, two regional hazard monitoring capacity building programs for earthquakes and volcanos, three programs to build capacity and strengthen institutions for the Latin American and Caribbean region, and one program to address health problems in Africa

1 Hazard monitoring can dramatically reduce loss of life

Hazard mapping and monitoring of Mt. Pinatubo allowed effective evacuation which minimized loss of life and economic assets from the volcanic explosion. However, the evaluations concluded that without explicit links to national preparedness and mitigation authorities, monitoring data were often not used. Further, sustainability of the project gains and maintenance and strengthening of national institutional capacity will require continued training and technical assistance.

2 Regional training programs are an effective mechanism for long term capacity building and increased preparedness

Both the Asian and LAC training programs have been well received in their respective regions resulting in the training of impressive numbers of disaster managers. Neither of the programs systematically follows its graduates to determine the appropriateness and applicability of the training curriculum or its long term impact on institutional capacity. The high demand for short term training has negatively impacted both programs' long term goals of expanding curriculum offerings and broadening its capacity to provide other mitigation and preparedness services. Training of Instructors' approaches proved effective in Latin America in creating a regional training cadre to sustain training capacity.

3 Sustainability of preparedness capacity requires donor collaboration

While donors do not often work at cross purposes to each other, neither do they regularly collaborate to build and sustain institutional capacity. Effective preparedness requires core funding of institutional capacity over the long term. At ADPC donors relied on OFDA to support core capacity and used their funds to support individual programs resulting in an over reliance on one funder. In programs to build national hazard monitoring capacity, donors did not work together to integrate funding programs and develop a long term effort to sustain and build national capacity. In several projects, managers did not systematically try to diversify financial support and secure dependable long term funding.

4 Not every country can equally benefit in a regional approach

Regional programs are often expected to be inclusive of all countries in the region. However, in light of limited resources and varying levels of national commitment to mitigation and preparedness, inclusiveness often results in scarce resources being expended in countries where little progress can reasonably be expected. In both Africa and Latin America, the acceptance and benefit from programs was clearly influenced by a government's commitment to strengthen preparedness and the capacity of the partnership Ministry to advance preparedness projects. At the same time, regional approaches do improve the potential for bi- and multi-lateral regional collaboration and technical assistance.

5 Sustainability of preparedness programs may require partnerships with institutions other than governments

While government support and commitment is critical for successful project implementation, political changes affect leadership and priorities in government institutions resulting in delays and other impediments. Regrettably, governments cannot be relied on for program sustainability. A program emphasis on community organization, self help efforts, private fundraising and involvement of the private sector appear the most promising strategies for achieving sustainability of preparedness programs. For example, a school preparedness program found that involving parents was a critical strategy.

6 Failure to adequately design a project will result in reduced accomplishments

While some ambiguity in project design is evident in every proposal, evaluators concluded that the desire to initiate a program may cause planners to overlook whether project resources are adequate to achieve project purposes, whether managerial responsibilities are established before commencing activities, and whether monitoring is sufficient to allow early identification and correction of implementation problems. A common design problem is the failure to link new projects to previous efforts in the country which were designed to build preparedness capacity.

DISASTER MITIGATION

Eight studies support the synthesis of lessons learned in this area. Six of these assess the sustainability of efforts to promote safer construction of informal housing through builder education programs established during the reconstruction phase of disasters. These six studies include 5 countries, i.e. Yemen (earthquake, 1982), Ecuador (earthquake, 1987), Jamaica (hurricanes 1979, 80, and 88), Solomon Islands (cyclones, 1984) and Madagascar (cyclones, 1984). The sixth study is a comparative analysis and synthesis of these five country studies. The two other studies examined retrofitting programs, one in Jamaica for residential construction and the other an historical analysis of factors leading the Government of Costa Rica to undertake a hospital retrofitting program.

1 The post-disaster reconstruction period presents an opportune time to introduce mitigation measures

Post-disaster reconstruction periods are characterized by heightened governmental and donor willingness to invest in mitigation. In Costa Rica and Jamaica, mitigation programs designed in the aftermath of one disaster languished until another disaster galvanized a renewed commitment.

Tying education programs to reconstruction programs is the best way to teach new building practices. Nevertheless, when projects have competing goals, e.g. long term behavioral change or micro-enterprise development and short term construction, short term construction goals are accorded priority.

2 Mitigation innovations are most sustainable when they are affordable and in keeping with evolving building practices

Evaluators found that mitigation materials and practices that result in extra cost are chosen by homeowners if they are subsidized but when the subsidy ends so does the innovation. The projects reviewed confirmed that builders would not, on their own, promote mitigation unless requested to do so by homeowners.

In both Jamaica and the Solomon Islands, builders showed a tendency to choose certain techniques and reject others. The failure to adopt the mitigation "system" ultimately resulted in increased vulnerability. In Yemen and the Solomon Islands, program planners failed to account for trends in material selection and house design and essentially trained builders for an outdated building technology. Innovations which require new materials or new practices, also require collateral efforts to ensure that mitigation devices are made available or produced by local suppliers.

3 Effective mitigation requires a long term commitment and resource capacity

A "flash" of mitigation in the immediate post disaster recovery period is possible but the critical factor is that mitigation be given a long term institutional home. The projects reviewed concluded that government cannot be relied on to sustain mitigation programs. Therefore, programs should target several different sectors of the building industry, especially the private (lending and insurance) and nongovernmental sector. Locally respected NGOs are effective in starting programs quickly and can be important partners in a sustainable mitigation strategy. However, they are often limited in their ability or willingness to sustain such programs especially if mitigation and housing construction are not an ongoing part of their mission.

Expatriate managed programs should plan for and implement transition to national authorities as soon as feasible but expatriate managers may need to continue involvement to sustain a long term commitment. In the Solomon Islands evaluators determined that a "culture of mitigation" had developed as a result of a critical mass of projects, government and donor commitment, ongoing builder education programs, the capacitation of NGOs and development and enforcement of building codes.

4 Training materials developed to promote long term education for mitigated building practices are not effective

Videos, 'how to' manuals, model houses, and other training aids were not used after projects ended. In part this was a result of the failure to update and disseminate the materials and provide ongoing training opportunities but, in general, these materials had a short 'shelf life'. Community based on the job training programs linked to a construction program had more influence than stand-alone classroom training programs and saturating an area with houses that demonstrate safe building techniques was found to be the most effective means to provide an ongoing source of education. Unfortunately the sustainability of effective training programs was limited by the failure to maintain lists of trained builders for use in future disaster reconstruction situations.

Evaluators concluded that demonstration programs could have had more widespread effect if they were implemented in areas vulnerable to the hazard but not affected by the current disaster. Further, demonstration programs failed to test a wide range of mitigation devices and approaches because they were not allowed to revise outcome expectations and, therefore, the goal of building homes took precedence over "demonstration" goals.

5 Informal housing is not affected by the formal building industry

While mitigation can be built into construction education programs the transfer of skills to the non-formal sector is indirect and unpredictable. Further, code development and enforcement, and the involvement of the insurance industry lead to sustainability of mitigation in the formal construction sector but not the informal sector. In the informal sector codes were unenforced and inspection schemes were unevenly implemented and not effective in insuring safe housing.

6 Beneficiary selection is problematic in the post-disaster reconstruction period

Identifying beneficiaries proved difficult in several cases. In part this was a result of the chaos that results from a disaster. Especially in remote areas, assessors were often unable to determine which structures were damaged or destroyed by the disaster and which had just deteriorated over time. Although not widespread, this assessment ambiguity helped to create conditions where beneficiary selection was subject to political and cultural influence as well as fraud.

7 Mitigation programs could improve their results through the utilization of improved marketing

None of the housing education mitigation efforts provided emergency housing or reconstruction and, therefore, the start up time would have allowed program designers to involve local people in design and implementation (social marketing) to determine which innovations were likely to be acceptable and sustainable and build knowledge, interest and commitment to the program.

Where there was systematic involvement such as in the Partners projects or in Jamaica, this involvement increased the chance for sustainability. However, more often beneficiaries were not involved. In Yemen, the lack of knowledge that market analysis would have provided resulted in culturally unacceptable house and site designs. In Costa Rica, the failure to systematically involve hospital administrators resulted in implementation delays and increased costs. In Jamaica, homeowners were not aware that subsidies were actually loans.

8 PL 480 funds can be effectively used to fund disaster management projects

While PL 480 funds allowed significant program expansion, using them was not without difficulties. Since these funds are available only in local currency they are sensitive to devaluation and their purchasing power declines over the life of a project in inflationary situations. Further, by virtue of being available only in local currency they cannot be used to pay for imported materials. Finally, they are under the control of government authorities, which, in the case of Madagascar and Yemen, resulted in significant delays in project implementation.

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SPECIAL STUDIES

Four special studies were analyzed to identify lessons learned. Two of these examined the potential reduction in hazard insurance coverage as a result of losses by reinsurers from disasters in the Caribbean. The other two studies were feasibility analyses. One considered the costs and benefits of retrofitting a hospital ship to serve as a disaster response tool. The other sought to determine the potential of a multi-hazard telecommunication network in the LAC region.

1 Special studies are an important tool to inform policy making

The studies of the likelihood of a reduction in reinsurance in the Caribbean concluded that such a reduction, even if it did occur, was likely to be only short-term. The analysis of costs of retrofitting the hospital ship indicated that such a project was not desirable. In both cases, the special studies provided policy makers with important insights which ultimately saved money and helped determine that certain types of project development were neither necessary or desirable.

Further, the studies were useful in helping orient program design. The reinsurance studies pointed out weaknesses in the structure of the insurance industry in the Caribbean and suggested potential areas for improvement. The analysis of the potential for telecommunications network highlighted the benefits from such a program and provided guidance, at an early stage of project design, that would ultimately strengthen the project and, at the same time, highlighted potential problem areas.

OVERALL IMPLICATIONS FOR EVALUATION IN OFDA

An additional set of lessons learned is derived from considering all the studies together. These lessons address evaluation issues specifically.

1 Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of programs are effective management tools in ensuring that programs stay on track

Particularly in Yemen, but also in several other projects, evaluations conducted during implementation resulted in program corrections that positively influenced achieving project goals. Monitors were able to meet with government authorities to redirect resources and advocate for government action. Monitoring and short term evaluations suggested changes in target beneficiaries and changes in project design.

2 Long term evaluations were useful in determining program impacts

Short term evaluations were able to determine whether the project objectives were achieved, e.g. were builders or school officials trained, were "how-to" manuals produced, or were relief materials delivered. However, long term evaluations, even after 10 years, were necessary to determine whether desired impacts were achieved, e.g. was builder or school official behavior changed, were "how-to" manuals used, or were relief materials used as intended. Unfortunately, projects were rarely designed to facilitate long term evaluation. Program documents and records were usually poorly maintained, if maintained at all.

3 Prior evaluations provide critical information

In several cases programs were evaluated by more than one stakeholder over the life of the project. When these previous evaluation results were systematically considered they provided important insights and a base for the new effort. For example, during the evaluation of the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, evaluators reviewed previous evaluations and determined that project personnel had failed to implement important recommendations. In Yemen, interim evaluations provided the major source of documentation which allowed the evaluation team to reconstruct the project evolution. However in some cases, such as the PAHO EPD study, there was little evidence that a major evaluation conducted by another donor was reviewed. There was limited evidence of proactive efforts by donors to routinely coordinate and share evaluation and monitoring data.

4 Conducting evaluations of similar types of projects facilitated comparisons and synthesis

The attempt to evaluate similar types of programs such as six different builder education projects, two hazard monitoring programs, or 3 rapid on-set disaster response efforts proved effective in identifying lessons learned that transcended individual projects. One time evaluations of isolated or unconnected programs tended to be idiosyncratic and the lessons learned were often constrained as a result of local contextual factors which ultimately inhibited their generalization.

5 Evaluation designs will vary depending on their expected use

The goals of the evaluation efforts considered varied across the projects. Some of the studies were interim efforts intended as a management tool to provide mid course correction. Others were final evaluations at the conclusion of a project intended to put a cap on the project and determine whether project objectives had been achieved. Still others were post hoc and intended to assess long term behavioral change. Finally, some were strategic intended to assess the policy implications of shifts in project environments. Evaluations which were designed with their goals in mind were much more likely to produce intended results. As may be expected, projects designed with evaluation in mind, tended to include reporting systems which provided a flow of outcome information which significantly improved the ability to conduct reliable evaluations and monitoring efforts.

6 Systematically considering a broad range of lessons previously learned can increase the potential for satisfactory project outcomes from future projects

The lessons described above contain important information which, if used, can inform policy making as well as project design. For example, the housing builder education projects taken as a whole contain important findings and recommendations which, if incorporated in future program designs, can substantially increase the potential for sustainability as well as effective mitigation. The sudden-onset response evaluations point out important impediments to an effective and efficient USAID reaction. The preparedness studies provide a range of insights that can significantly increase the likelihood preparedness capacity building can be sustained. Unfortunately, evaluations are too often a stand alone effort unconnected in a systematic way to ongoing organizational activities.

OVERALL EVALUATION IN OFDA

- 1 OFDA should ensure that projects have adequate monitoring as part of their implementation plan. Monitoring can be useful in keeping projects on track and on time, ensuring that programs are free of fraud and that intended beneficiaries are receiving aid, and proposing adaptations in goals or objectives as conditions change.
- 2 OFDA should support long term evaluations, e.g. up to several years after a project has ended, because they can be effective in assessing project outcomes which seek to change mitigation and preparedness behaviors. In order to conduct such evaluations, however, it is imperative that OFDA require that project records be maintained.
- 3 OFDA should support efforts to coordinate the sharing of project monitoring and evaluation data. As part of this effort OFDA should require evaluations to reference other previous or ongoing evaluation efforts conducted by other organizations and donors.
- 4 In general, knowledge will be increased by conducting several evaluations within a general programmatic area thus allowing comparisons between projects and reducing the impact of project specific, contextual factors.
- 5 Because different types of evaluation designs yield different types of results, OFDA must be careful to ensure that evaluation designs are appropriate for their purposes.
- 6 OFDA should commit to the M&E function as an important ongoing part of PMP and DRD strategies. This will require dedicated resources and a willingness and capacity to utilize results to build institutional knowledge. It will further require that OFDA continue systematically to review its evaluation portfolio, work with its grantees on the managing-for-results approach, including the development of more performance based proposals and ensuring adequate monitoring and appropriate reporting. Finally, OFDA needs to continuously feed lessons learned back into its own strategy and management.