

Humanitarian Coordination and Information Management Sector Update

OCTOBER 2013

SECTOR OVERVIEW

When a disaster occurs, the subsequent influx of humanitarian personnel and supplies can be overwhelming, with numerous agencies gathering information on damage, humanitarian needs, and local capacity to respond. Without a system to collect, organize, and convey information, humanitarian agencies can lose important knowledge and potentially delay the arrival of essential aid and appropriate assistance. Information management involves collecting, processing, and packaging data and information in a useful way for those involved in humanitarian response.

USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA), the lead U.S. Government (USG) office for international disaster response, engages with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the U.N., and other donors to support the humanitarian cluster system—the coordinating bodies for humanitarian activities in a disaster-stricken country—that forms the basis for effective coordination and information management during an emergency. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2013, USAID/OFDA provided more than \$60 million for humanitarian coordination and information management programs across the globe.

IMPROVING HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE COORDINATION THROUGH OCHA

In FY 2013, USAID/OFDA provided nearly \$31.6 million to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for programs supporting humanitarian coordination and information management. OCHA is responsible for coordinating humanitarian actors to ensure a coherent emergency response. USAID/OFDA supports OCHA activities at the country, regional, and global levels, including a broad range of programs to strengthen humanitarian leadership, accountability, and coordination.

For instance, at the global level, in FY 2013, USAID/OFDA continued to support OCHA's Humanitarian Coordination Support Section, which reinforces global and in-country leadership and coordination systems by focusing on accountability, response quality, and capacity development for OCHA staff, NGO partners, and other humanitarian actors. Similarly, USAID/OFDA provided critical funding to strengthen humanitarian leadership, improve institutional partnerships with humanitarian actors, train humanitarian personnel, and support OCHA's information and communications services. USAID/OFDA global support has helped position OCHA as a central humanitarian actor in the UN system.

At the regional level, USAID/OFDA provides support to OCHA's regional coordination offices, which work closely with humanitarian and government partners to enhance national and regional disaster preparedness and response. These regional coordination offices also provide important surge capacity to countries without a sustained OCHA presence. USAID/OFDA also provides support to numerous OCHA country offices.

Partnering with OCHA, the University of Georgia's Information Technology Outreach Services will co-develop and provide Common Operational Datasets, standard geographic data layers for each country—including nationally approved administrative boundaries, populated places, roads, and rivers—as live, online services. Field information management officers will use these services during humanitarian response activities to facilitate the compilation, analysis, and sharing of humanitarian data and information, including the conditions of affected population and response activities. These services will also support a larger initiative to create documents using the developing Humanitarian Exchange Language, a format that will facilitate the sharing of documents and data among humanitarian agencies.

STRENGTHENING COORDINATED NEEDS ASSESSMENTS: ACAPS AND KOBO

The proliferation of smart phones, tablets, and other wireless devices creates new vehicles for information sharing and more opportunities for the humanitarian community to utilize information, particularly among first responders on the ground during crises. USAID/OFDA supports a number of initiatives that strengthen needs assessment capacity within the humanitarian community, including the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS), implemented by the Norwegian Refugee Council. ACAPS deploys experts to conduct in-country needs assessments before, during, and after crises to provide timely information to humanitarian actors via mobile applications, online products, and printed materials.

Building on existing efforts to coordinate assessments and reporting methodologies, USAID/OFDA is working with OCHA, the International Rescue Committee, and the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) to develop and disseminate an easy-to-use emergency assessment tool called the KoBo Coordinated Assessment Toolkit. This tool will allow for flexible digital data collection and will be tailored and expanded for use in the difficult environments where humanitarian actors operate.

BUILDING A BETTER RESPONSE

As part of an initiative to better integrate NGOs into the humanitarian cluster system, USAID/OFDA supports the Building a Better Response (BBR) program. The project, led by the International Medical Corps, in conjunction with Concern Worldwide and the HHI, conducts workshops to train and engage NGOs at key regional hubs on humanitarian response systems, engages with non-traditional donors in humanitarian donorship, and develops e-learning courses to fill gaps in existing NGO training. In FY 2013, BBR held workshops attended by international and local NGOs in Bangkok, Thailand; Manila, Philippines; Port-au-Prince, Haiti; and Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS IN AFGHANISTAN

In FY 2013, USAID/OFDA provided more than \$2 million to Information Management and Mine Action Programs (iMMAP) in Afghanistan as part of a multi-year commitment to provide a common operating picture of the humanitarian situation to Afghan authorities, members of the U.N. cluster system, and the international community. A USAID/OFDA partner in Afghanistan since 2010, iMMAP is working to build the capacity of humanitarian agencies, the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority, and other government authorities to facilitate timely reporting on humanitarian needs while improving baseline data, crisis monitoring, and forecasting capabilities. Overall, USAID/OFDA provided nearly \$3.6 million in FY 2013 to support humanitarian coordination and information management in Afghanistan, as well as additional support to eight humanitarian clusters through existing programs in other sectors.

ADDITIONAL HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION ACTIVITIES

- **ALNAP Steering Committee:** In FY 2013, USAID/OFDA continued to serve on the steering committee of the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP), a forum for the humanitarian community to share lessons learned and best practices on emerging issues relevant to international humanitarian action.
- **NGO Coordination Through InterAction:** USAID/OFDA encourages coordination with and among NGOs through support to InterAction—an alliance of more than 180 U.S.-based NGOs. With USAID/OFDA assistance, InterAction’s Humanitarian Policy and Practice Team fosters a dialogue between InterAction’s NGO members and USAID. USAID/OFDA staff, U.S. Department of State colleagues, and InterAction members meet frequently to share information on the latest humanitarian developments and concerns.
- **Improving the Availability of Disaster Loss Data:** USAID/OFDA supports the Emergency Events Database at the Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters. Available to the public online, the database provides more than a century’s worth of statistics on disasters worldwide, allowing for trend analyses, response preparedness, and planning, and historical comparisons.