

USAID/OFDA LOGISTICS AND RELIEF COMMODITIES SECTOR UPDATE – OCTOBER 2012

SECTOR OVERVIEW

As the lead U.S. Government (USG) office for international disaster response, USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) facilitates and coordinates the purchase and movement of emergency relief commodities worldwide. USAID/OFDA stockpiles relief supplies at regional warehouses in Miami, Florida; Pisa, Italy; and Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Stockpiled commodities include blankets, plastic sheeting for emergency shelter, family hygiene kits, kitchen sets, Zodiac boats, 10-liter collapsible water containers, 10,000-liter water storage bladders, and trailer-mounted water treatment units. In addition to stockpiled items, USAID/OFDA maintains a full-time logistics team that enables a rapid response in the aftermath of disaster. In the event of a large-scale disaster, USAID/OFDA can augment the core team with USAID/OFDA-trained logisticians, including staff from the U.S. Forest Service's Disaster Assistance Support Program and Urban Search and Rescue teams from the Fairfax County, Virginia, Fire and Rescue Department and the Los Angeles County, California, Fire Department.

The USAID/OFDA full-time logistics team in Washington, D.C., coordinates the delivery of relief supplies from regional warehouse hubs to affected areas via air, sea, or land. USAID/OFDA logisticians can also rapidly procure relief items that are not stockpiled in regional warehouses from numerous suppliers around the world. As the majority of emergency responses require airlifts, USAID/OFDA works closely with USAID's Office of Acquisition and Assistance to utilize commercial aircraft in order to expedite the delivery of relief supplies, when necessary. The USAID/OFDA logisticians may also coordinate with the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) to employ military assets for transportation support, most often using DoD helicopters to airlift emergency relief supplies to disaster-affected areas that are inaccessible or far from the nearest airport. Logistics staff in the field receive the commodities and ensure that supplies reach implementing partners for distribution to affected populations. USAID/OFDA may also pre-position personnel and emergency relief supplies in the event of an impending disaster, such as a hurricane or volcanic eruption, to ensure that assistance is available to affected communities as humanitarian needs arise.



A woman receives USAID/OFDA-funded plastic sheeting and other emergency relief supplies following cyclones and floods in Mozambique. (Photo by Lisa Gabriel/USAID)

ASSESSING AIR OPERATIONS IN SUDAN AND SOUTH SUDAN

Humanitarian air operations provide reliable transport, enable security and medical evacuations, and facilitate increased access for humanitarian organizations responding to the needs of vulnerable populations, many of whom reside in remote locations. In late 2011, a USAID/OFDA logistics specialist, along with representatives from the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID) and the European Commission's Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO), conducted a joint donor review of U.N. Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) operations in Sudan and South Sudan.

USAID/OFDA built on its experience in coordinating efficient and cost-effective air transport services to assess UNHAS operations and inform strategy development to maintain regular and safe flights for the humanitarian community in post-independence South Sudan.

STREAMLINING USAID/OFDA COMMODITIES

In FY 2012, the USAID/OFDA logistics team worked to update USAID/OFDA stockpiled commodities and streamline mechanisms to procure emergency relief supplies, thereby helping to improve the speed, efficiency, and effectiveness of disaster assistance. USAID/OFDA logistics officers examined each step of the emergency response process from assessment to procurement to distribution and invited USAID staff, technical experts, and partner organizations to review products housed and distributed by USAID/OFDA. The logistics team also discussed best practices and commodity standardization with U.N. agencies and international organizations to identify commodities best suited to meet the most common and broadest range of needs in post-disaster settings.



USAID/OFDA stockpiled emergency relief supplies in the Miami, Florida warehouse. (Photo by Micaela White/USAID)

As a result of review and research, USAID/OFDA has revised basic supplies, added new items, and brought many commodity specifications in-line with those used by other humanitarian partners. New and altered commodities include both medium and high thermal fleece blankets, plastic sheeting in metric measurements, residual chlorine test kits to determine water source purification levels, Oxfam-style water tanks and pumps, water purification tablets for home use, and improved hygiene kits—better equipped with products for women—sufficient to meet the needs of a five-person family for one month. Under new USAID-wide procurement reform regulations, USAID/OFDA can more easily purchase emergency supplies from more than 90 countries and territories, many of which have received USAID/OFDA assistance in the past. In addition, the USAID/OFDA logistics team has worked to shorten the time for replenishing supplies in USAID/OFDA warehouses after items are dispatched to disaster sites.

The USAID/OFDA logistics team continues to monitor all aspects of the commodities supply chain, frequently inspecting the production, distribution, and impact of supplies to help ensure suitable, rapid assistance to disaster-affected populations around the world.

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