

Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA)

South Asia Region, Regional Office for Asia-Pacific, Bangkok, Thailand

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Exploring ICS Adaptation and Flood Preparedness in India

Starting in late July, several members of the USAID/OFDA South Asia team—including the Bangkok-based principal regional advisor (PRA), disaster risk reduction (DRR) advisor, regional advisor (RA), and the Washington, D.C.,-based team leader—traveled to India to observe USAID/OFDA-funded program activities, assess recent flood damage, and meet with staff from local partner organizations, USAID/India, and the Government of India (Gol).

One goal of the trip was to look into India's adaptation of the incident command system (ICS)—an integrated organizational framework designed to facilitate effective and streamlined emergency response—which USAID/OFDA and USAID/India began supporting through training in India in 2002.

The USAID/OFDA team found that the GoI has enthusiastically incorporated ICS into its own disaster response structure, going so far as to make ICS training a requirement for all incoming administrative civil servants. One GoI official noted to the (Continued on page 2)



In Assam, locals have employed a number of flood preparedness measures, including elevated grain stores in low-lying areas. (Photo by Michael Ernst, USAID/OFDA)

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Assessing Earthquake Preparedness in Bangladesh

Between July 31 and August 10, a USAID/OFDA RA visited Bangladesh's capital of Dhaka and northeastern city of Sylhet to assess the country's current earth-quake risk reduction measures to help USAID/Bangladesh develop earthquake preparedness programs.



Currently,
Bangladesh's
disaster preparedness activities
focus mostly on
hydrometeorological hazards—
unsurprising
given Bangladesh's high population exposure to floods.

Construction workers in Sylhet. (Photo by Rob Friedman, USAID/ OFDA)

(Continued on page 2)

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Preparing USG Agencies for Disaster through a Tabletop Exercise in Pakistan

On July 18, 2012, USAID/OFDA's PRA for South Asia, USAID/OFDA's senior program officer for Pakistan, and staff from the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad and the Office of Defense Representative for Pakistan participated in a monsoon preparedness tabletop exercise to help ensure that U.S. Government (USG) agencies in Pakistan are organized and well-equipped to respond effectively in the event of a major disaster.

The exercise was timed to coincide with the onset of Pakistan's monsoon season and centered around a large-scale flooding scenario similar to the highly destructive floods of 2010.

Through the exercise, participants acquired a better understanding of the U.S. disaster declaration process and the roles and responsibilities of U.S. agencies and the international humanitarian community during a disaster. Each agency had the opportunity to review the actions it would be expected to take and the organizations with which it would liaise during a large-scale disaster.

Upon concluding the exercise, participants discussed ways to institutionalize disaster preparedness within USG agencies in Pakistan and scale up efforts to promote DRR in the country. The exercise also gave USAID/OFDA regional staff the opportunity to discuss ongoing program activities in detail with U.S. Embassy representatives.

DISASTER RESPONSE

Wrapping Up the Bahaal Project in Pakistan

In response to Pakistan's unprecedented floods of 2010, USAID/OFDA supported a diverse portfolio of programs to help reduce the widespread humanitarian needs precipitated by the disaster. One such intervention, known as Bahaal—the Urdu word for recovery—aimed to provide critical support to people affected by the floods through the Rural Support Programs Network.

By August 2012, when USAID/OFDA began wrapping up its Bahaal project activities, USAID/OFDA's Bahaal implementing partner had established nearly 400 community organizations working together to rebuild local infrastructure, mobilized more than 5,060 households to hundreds of worksites, and provided much-needed equipment and cash grants to help families replace lost assets, rehabilitate homes, and invest in income generation activitieswith priority given to the most vulnerable people, including women.



The 2010 floods killed tens of thousands of people and destroyed crops and household assets. (Photo courtesy of the U.N. World Health Organization)

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Leveraging Community Resources to Prepare for Disaster in Pakistan

USAID/OFDA has championed a community-focused approach throughout its Pakistan portfolio, supporting programs aimed at supporting emergency needs, while reducing the risk of future disasters.

Through an implementing partner, USAID/OFDA supports the training of community disaster management committees and teachers on DRR and, as of early August 2012, had trained more than 14,800 people in disaster preparedness, mitigation, and management; assisted in the development of nearly 125 community DRR plans; and organized II disaster response and recovery advocacy events. The partner organization also distributed disaster preparedness materials to community members and trained newly established local emergency response teams in search and rescue. Perhaps most importantly, the program helps establish improved linkages between affected communities and local governments.

All of these activities reduce local communities' dependence on national or international assistance to prepare for and respond to local emergencies.

Exploring ICS Adaptation and Flood Preparedness in India

(Continued from page I)

USAID/OFDA team that ICS had been "instrumental" in establishing a Gol National Disaster Response Force. The Gol's robust support and appreciation for ICS will ensure

program sustainability and ultimately help the Gol respond to major catastrophes more effectively, reducing requirements for international support.

The USAID/OFDA team also spent time in the eastern state of Assam, where often deadly monsoon flooding affects residents each year.

The team found that over many years of recurrent flooding, people in Assam have developed effective coping mechanisms, such as storing grain in elevated buildings and moving livestock to higher ground at the first sign of flooding.

In addition, many local organ- South Asia Bill Berger visitizations are developing innovative ing algae holding tanks at techniques to facilitate flood re- an agricultural research covery. For example, an agricul- facility in Assam. (Photo tural research center in Assam is by Michael Ernst, USAID/ cultivating algae which improve OFDA)



USAID/OFDA PRA

post-flood soil fertility when applied to affected croplands. Linking such research organizations with affected communities has expanded and improved local coping mechanisms.

By the end of the trip, the USAID/OFDA team had acquired a greater understanding of Indian ICS integration, as well as local preparedness measures for floods in Assam.

Assessing Earthquake Preparedness in Bangladesh (Continued from page 1)

However, the country sits on the northeastern edge of the Indian tectonic plate, making a large, destructive earthquake a very real possibility.

To investigate the country's exposure and preparedness in detail, the USAID/OFDA RA met with representatives from local disaster response agencies, non-governmental organizations, academia, international organizations, and international donors, gathering information on Bangladesh's seismic profile and vulnerabilities, cataloguing Government of Bangladesh (GoB) earthquake risk reduction efforts over the past several years, and identifying critical areas for improvement.

USAID/OFDA plans to continue tracking GoB efforts to improve earthquake preparedness across the country and work with USAID/Bangladesh to build on these activities.

Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance Regional Office for Asia-Pacific

USAID's Regional Development Mission for Asia (RDMA) Bangkok, Thailand

Tel: +66-2-257-3000 Internet: www.usaid.gov

