

v. International Disaster Assistance Programs

The countries of the world have many opportunities for learning from developing countries. Disaster assistance programs are based largely on the experiences of industrialized countries and donors in disaster mitigation, preparedness, and response. Two such organizations dominate disaster-related services and resources in the predisaster and postdisaster phases: the U.S. Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) of the Agency for International Development (AID) and the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO). Together with subsidiary agencies, a few other governments, and many voluntary organizations, this is the international disaster donor community.

DISASTER ASSISTANCE IN A COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT

International disaster assistance is frequently influenced by one or more of the following factors which can act to the detriment of disaster victims' needs:

- sovereignty,
- multiplicity of donors, and
- political nature of disaster events.

Severe Intensity

In the 1972-74 Sahelian drought, the affected countries refused to recognize the existence of a severe emergency for several months during the height of the tourist season. Even given that the drought might be an extreme case, matters of sovereignty, pride of country, and demonstrations of self-reliance and responsibility are important factors that enter into international disaster assistance. In some cases, these factors stimulate positive efforts at in-country self-help. In other cases, however, they result in delays and inefficiencies due to sensitivity to foreign

assistance and suspicion of the motives of donor countries.

Issues of sovereignty also arise during relief efforts. Some nations are hesitant to permit the use of foreign military disaster assessment teams or permit the uncontrolled overflight of relief aircraft which, again, are often military. Whether political constraints or legitimate fears, the issue of satellite remote sensing of foreign countries also remains to be solved.

Finally, sovereignty can directly limit the humanitarian goals of U.S. assistance. What recourse would the United States have if the government of a disaster-stricken nation simply refused aid?

International Politics

The complex politics of disaster were carried to the extreme in Bangladesh. In 1970, a devastating cyclone struck East Pakistan causing over \$25 million in damages and affecting 10 million people. In addition to short-term effects, the general neglect of reconstruction by the central government in West Pakistan was a major reason for the ensuing protracted civil war. Refugees of the civil strife subsequently burdened the Government of India to such a degree that it declared war on Pakistan in 1971. The conflict resulted in the independence of East Pakistan, then renamed Bangladesh. Bangladesh, since 1970 has accounted for nearly 25 percent of all U.S. assistance, beginning with relief following the cyclone and continuing through the civil war and refugee resettlement. Relief for war refugees, through September 1972, totaled \$296 million and the cyclone relief added another \$16 million.

Civil strife in Bangladesh is not an isolated case. Historically, the largest number of U.S. relief efforts have taken place in response to natural disasters. Hazards that have a rapid onset, such as earthquakes, tropical cyclones, hurricanes, and river floods, have especially attracted U.S.

¹James C. Morentz, *The Making of an International Event: Communism and the Drought in West Africa* (University of Pennsylvania: doctoral dissertation, 1976), p. 153.

emergency response. These rapid onset disasters, however, have received only a minority of U.S. financial aid: approximately 30 percent since 1965. The creeping disasters of drought and epidemics account for only another 10 percent of all funds. The largest proportion of the \$1.6 billion provided by the U.S. Government has gone to a category of manmade disasters: civil strife and civil war. Approximately 60 percent of all U.S. funds have gone to victims of civil strife, internal political problems, and wars. Recent examples include Cyprus, 1974-75; the Dominican Republic, 1965; Nigeria, 1969; Jordan, 1970; and the Middle East during the 1967 Seven-Day War.

The leading recipients of U.S. disaster assistance since 1975, shown in table 5, suggest the complex political nature of disaster assistance, represented especially by the four cases of civil strife. In an effort to avoid politicizing U.S. assistance in civil strife, OFDA usually makes funds available to U.N. agencies or voluntary organizations. For example, in the 1974 Cyprus civil war, all U.S. funds were channeled through the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). In the 1973 Mid-East War and Sudan civil strife, UNHCR and ICRC were again active with U.S. voluntary agencies in seeking an equitable distribution of U.S. Government aid to victims on all sides of the conflicts.

Table S.-Leading Recipients of U.S. Assistance Since 1965

1.	Bangladesh Civil Strife and Aftermath: 1971-73
2.	India Drought and Famine: 1965-67
3.	Peru Earthquake: 1970
4.	Nigeria Civil Strife: 1967-69
5.	Bangladesh Cyclone: 1970
6.	Nicaragua Earthquake: 1972
7.	Philippines Floods: 1972
8.	Sahel Drought: 1973-75
9.	Ethiopia Drought: 1974-75
10.	Pakistan Floods: 1974
11.	Somalia Drought: 1974-75
12.	Cyprus Civil Strife: 1974-75
13.	Honduras Hurricane: 1974
14.	Lebanon Civil Strife: 1975-76
15.	Guatemala and Italy Earthquakes: 1976

Ranked by amount of U.S. relief expenditures.
SOURCE: Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, AID.

Multiplicity of donors

An international disaster assistance effort may consist of several dozen donors, greatly increasing the problems of coordination. Table 6 shows the

broad sweep of government and institutional involvement in a major disaster. Through February 16, 1976, response to the great Guatemala earthquake came from 26 countries bilaterally, 8 international organizations, 1 foundation, 25 voluntary organizations, and 70 countries through the League of Red Cross Societies. Compared to domestic disaster assistance, this presents a problem of different magnitude (numbers, distances, languages, and politics) rather than kind. Yet, the difference is significant.

The diverse number of public and private organizations that participate in international disaster-assistance activities creates its own problem. In any major disaster, this multiplicity of involvement—for different reasons, at different levels of contribution, with different capabilities, and with different degrees of independent performance—virtually guarantees problems of coordination among the many private and governmental international donors and between the donors and the disaster-stricken nation. As the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) Committee on International Disaster Assistance wrote: "To talk of an international disaster-response system is inappropriate because that concept implies relatively high levels of mutual awareness, interdependence, and coordinated activity that presently do not exist."

For example, during the international donor response to the Sahelian drought, logistics experts from the United States and other donor countries established a plan for scheduling the arrival and offloading of ships carrying relief grains and cereals into the ports of Dakar, Senegal, and Abidjan, Ivory Coast. This schedule was of critical importance because of the grossly inadequate rail and road transportation to the inland-affected populations. The cooperation of nations in staggering the arrival of ships was crucial, and the system worked. One day, ships of the People's Republic of China arrived, demanded to be offloaded, and by doing so wrecked the carefully scheduled system for weeks.

In summary, the environment in which industrialized nations assist in less developed country dis-

² *Review of the U.S. Government Foreign Disaster Assistance Programs* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy of Sciences, National Research Council, Commission on Sociotechnical Systems, Committee on International Disaster Assistance, 1978), p. 5.

Table 6.-International Assistance to the Guatemala Earthquake of 1976

<i>National Donor Assistance</i>			
Argentina	Ecuador	Mexico	Spain
Belgium	France	New Zealand	Sweden
Brazil	Germany, FRG	Nicaragua	Switzerland
Canada	Haiti	Norway	United Kingdom
Colombia	Honduras	Panama	United States
Costa Rica	Israel	Peru	Venezuela
Dominican Republic	Italy		
<i>International Organization Assistance</i>			
Organizations of American States (OAS)			
League of Red Cross Societies (liCROSS)			
European Economic Community (EEC)			
Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)			
United Nations System			
World Health Organization (WHO)			
World Food Program (WFP)			
United Nations International Childrens Fund (UNICEF)			
United Nations Disaster Relief Organization (U NDRO)			
through United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)			
<i>Voluntary Agency Assistance</i>			
Assemblies of God	Interchurch Medical Assistance	World Relief Commission	
Baptist World Alliance	Lutheran World Service	World University Service	
CARE	Mennonite Central Committee	World Vision International	
Catholic Relief Services—	Medical Assistance Program	American Friends Service	
United States Catholic	Salvation Army	Committee	
Conference	Seventh Day Adventists	American National Red Cross	
Christian Reformed World	World Service	Christian Aid	
Relief Committee	Southern Baptist Convention	Help the Aged	
Church World Service	Foreign Mission Board	British Red Cross	
David Livingston Foundation	World Neighbors, Inc.	Mormon Mission	
Food for the Hungry			
<i>League of Red Cross Societies</i>			
Afghanistan	Dominican Republic	Japan	Peru
Australia	Equador	Korea Rep.	Philippines
Austria	Egypt	Kuwait	Poland
Bahamas	El Salvador	Lebanon	Romania
Barbados	Ethiopia	Liechtenstein	Singapore
Belgium	Finland	Luxembourg	South Africa
Bolivia	Fed. Rep. of Germany	Malaysia	Spain
Brazil	France	Mauritius	Surinam
Bulgaria	German Dem. Rep.	Mexico	Sweden
Canada	Great Britain	Monaco	Switzerland
Chile	Greece	Morocco	Thailand
China	Honduras	Netherlands	Trinidad and Tobago
Columbia	Hungary	New Zealand	Turkey
Costa Rica	Iceland	Nicaragua	Uruguay
Cuba	[ran	Norway	United States
Cyprus	Ireland	Panama	U.S.S.R.
Czechoslovakia	Italy	Paraguay	Yugoslavia
Denmark	Jamaica		
<i>Other Assistance</i>			
Pan American Development Foundation			

SOURCE: Compiled from: Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, U.N. Disaster Relief Organization, League of Red Cross Societies, and the American Council of Voluntary Agencies for Foreign Service.

asters provides many opportunities for U.S. disaster programs to observe and learn about complex disaster behavior and organization.

U.S. POLICIES ON DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Faced with the complexities of assistance to developing countries, the United States continues to observe the primary and traditional motivation of disaster assistance, humanitarianism. Only a few of the countries to which assistance is given each year are of strategic importance. The humanitarian concern was reemphasized by the Carter administration. A cable in August of 1977 instructed all U.S. Ambassadors to ensure that the needs of disaster victims were met. Particularly stressed were those instances where the government of the disaster-affected nation was not responding sufficiently to the needs of the victims. According to an OFDA document, "This policy linked disaster assistance with the protection of the most fundamental human right—the right to survive.

Among the other key elements of the U.S. foreign disaster assistance policy are eight activities designed to:

- Render emergency relief, in coordination with other governments, international agencies, and voluntary organizations, to victims of natural and manmade foreign disasters. Such assistance can be provided to the people of any nation affected by disasters and must, to the greatest extent possible, reach those areas most in need of relief and rehabilitation.
- Monitor all potential and actual disaster situations.
- Assist in rehabilitation when such rehabilitation is beyond the capacity of local resources.
- Encourage and participate in foreign disaster preparedness through the provision of technical assistance and international training programs.
- Consider on a case-by-case basis longer term reconstruction assistance, where there has been severe social and economic disruption, and implement the program as a development tool.

- Support the efforts of international organizations and voluntary agencies involved in foreign disaster assistance.
- Increase U.S. technical capacity to define disaster-prone conditions and to recommend disaster avoidance measures.
- Initiate, within international fora, efforts to increase other donor participation in disaster relief, preparedness, and prevention.

Implicit and explicit donor country values affect the crucial decision of what, where, when, and how foreign disaster assistance will be provided. Because these **values** motivate decisions and help to establish the general framework within which organizations operate, the necessity of having a clear rationale for involvement in international disaster assistance should be evident.

The Committee on International Disaster Assistance recently suggested that the AID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance focus on several questions (table 7) in developing an explicit rationale for the U.S. Government programs. These questions illustrate the complexity involved in merging individual donor country values into a consistent international donor community value. Furthermore, they point out the need for the potential recipients to make clear their views on the expected role of the donor nations and their own in-country programs during disaster.

In its analysis of U.S. disaster assistance to the developing countries, the NAS Committee attempted to state its "basic value premises." These in general summarize many of the congressional attitudes of recent years. Furthermore, they express a rationale for U.S. participation in developing country disasters which is "essentially the rationale of the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance which was accepted by the Academy," according to former OFDA Director Anne Martindell.

The Committee believes that the policy framework, strategies, and ethics of international disaster assistance should be guided by the basic principles of humanitarianism, evidenced by a concern for the response to the human needs of disaster victims. The Committee also believes that the fundamental purpose of international disaster assistance should be to respond to the locally unmet needs of disaster victims. Thus the nature and quantity of

¹U.S. *Foreign Disaster Assistance* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Agency for International Development, Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, January 1978), p. 3.

⁴Letter from Anne Martindell, Director, U.S. Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, January 1479.

Table 7.-Questions for Developing U.S. International Disaster Programs

1. What types of disasters should be included in a U.S. program of international disaster assistance? Should key criterion be the magnitude of the damage? If so, what measure or combination of measures should be used—death, injury, property damage?
2. To what extent should foreign disaster relief be used as a vehicle to enhance foreign policy goals? The pursuit of foreign policy goals implies criteria that have only marginal relationships to the magnitudes of disaster impacts or to the capability of a country to meet its own disaster-induced needs. The potential conflict between these two sets of objectives needs to be carefully considered.
3. At what point in the disaster process should assistance be provided? Should assistance be restricted to the emergency period? Or would it be more productive to provide assistance in the development of disaster mitigation techniques or for the organization of preparedness measures? Should the type and timing of emergency assistance take into account its potential utility in longer term rehabilitation and recovery? What types of recovery aid will be cost-effective in enabling the society to be better prepared to cope with future disasters?
4. What type of aid is needed most? A concern with disaster victims is certainly appropriate but victim populations can be defined in various ways—as individuals, families, tribes, and as local, regional, and national governments. In fact, to think of the “victim” as society is often important. If this is done, societal needs would become a much more important focus. Society-focused needs would shift types of assistance toward the replacement of “damaged” societal resources (e.g., thereplacement of roadbuilding equipment or communications facilities). In light of the fact that international disaster assistance is usually provided to nations that are struggling to achieve greater self-sufficiency, should the avoidance of future dependency relationships, (particularly technological ones) be one of the criteria used in determining the type of assistance rendered?
5. How should disaster needs be determined? Should needs be specified by the affected country or should the needs be determined by what the donor wishes to give? Should needs be determined by an international body which then solicits contributions from the international community? Do affected countries have the right to refuse assistance, particularly if donor countries still perceive unmet needs?

SOURCE: The National Academy of Science, Committee on International Disaster Assistance, pp. 3S-37.

international disaster assistance should be conditioned not only by the intensity of impacts and the vulnerability of human settlements, but also by the capability of the affected community to meet its own disaster-generated needs. Outside disaster assistance should complement, not duplicate, the existing resources and response activities of the recipient country. Donors should help but not overwhelm, assist but not create a dependency relationship, provide for genuinely needed goods and services but not disrupt the natural adjustment mechanisms in the disaster-stricken population. Finally, we believe that the external contributions to the stricken nation should be the result of coordinated rather than disjointed effort.⁵

THE STRUCTURE OF U.S. ASSISTANCE

The Government's international disaster assistance over the last two decades has greatly expanded in resources allocated, in skill, in its professional response, in its expanding knowledge base, and in sophistication as reflected in an awareness of broader needs for policy and program improvement.

⁵Committee on International Disaster Assistance, *Assessing International Disaster Needs* (Washington, D. C.: National Academy of Sciences-National Research Council 1979), p.6.

The National Research Council recently noted that:

In the past decade a rapid evolution has occurred in the need for and the organization of international disaster assistance. During the last 12 years, the U.S. Government has responded to disasters in other countries in which over 3.6 million people lost their lives and 474 million people were seriously affected. It has contributed \$1.6 billion out of a total of \$3.6 billion donated for foreign disaster assistance. Seventy-five percent of all U.S. Government disaster assistance has been expended in the last 5 years, and since 1957 the public sector share of U.S. disaster assistance has expanded from 15 percent to more than 80 percents

A review of the structure of the U.S. disaster assistance program must consider three items: the organization of OFDA and its capabilities, the “triggering” mechanism by which assistance is initiated, and OFDA'S coordination with both international organizations and private voluntary organizations.

Organization of the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance

The first major effort to coordinate the U.S. Government's response to international disasters

⁶*Annual Report*, (Washington, D. C.: National Academy of Sciences, National Research Council, 1977), p.177.

was made in 1964. Previously, not only did the disaster response capability suffer but no accumulation of experience nor continuity of expertise was maintained. Following the designation of a Foreign Disaster Relief Coordinator in AID in 1964, interagency relief coordinators were appointed in the Departments of State; Defense; and Health, Education, and Welfare, and the initial Government-wide response capability was begun.

Several reorganizations of this capability have taken place, most recently in 1977. Today, two divisions exist: Operations, which conducts actual relief efforts, monitors all potential disasters, and evaluates and plans disaster relief efforts; and Preparedness, which develops early warning systems, strengthens disaster preparedness, and plans in the long term.

The capabilities and resources of this organization include:

- a staff of about 20 people,
- a budget that averages about \$25 million,
- stockpiles of emergency supplies in four locations around the world,
- Mission Disaster Relief Officers in embassies,
- a discretionary disaster relief authority of \$25,000 for each Ambassador,
- access to Food for Peace (Public Law 480) food commodities,
- an Emergency Operations Center with round-the-clock monitoring and communications capabilities,
- a reserve cadre in AID regional and bureau personnel,
- an information system of historical data, and
- an integrated evaluation system that permits "lessons learned" in past disaster performance to be systematically incorporated into future decisions.

The Triggering Mechanism

The process by which U.S. assistance is given to a disaster-stricken country begins with the U.S. Ambassador. It is the Ambassador, or Chief of the Diplomatic Mission, who determines if a particular event "is of a magnitude to warrant U.S. help and whether such aid would be acceptable to the stricken country." Upon such determination, two immediate resources become available. First, the Ambassador's discretionary relief authority of

\$25,000 can be used as a cash donation to the government, to voluntary agencies, or to make local purchases of goods, transport, or labor. Second, with the approval of AID, the Ambassador can shift Public Law 480 food commodities that are already in the country to the emergency operations, usually as a gift.

[If the scope of the disaster exceeds the two immediately available resources, the Ambassador communicates the needs to OFDA. Supplies must be approved by OFDA, usually only after an on-site assessment of needs and available resources. Coordination of supply, transportation, in-country distribution, and personnel is the responsibility of OFDA. When the requirements of the disaster greatly exceed the capabilities of OFDA, special allocations from Congress are often forthcoming.

Coordination With Other Disaster Organizations

In recent years, the requirements for effective coordination have increased as the volume of international disaster assistance and the number of participants have greatly expanded. As the Committee on International Disaster Assistance reported:

... there has been an increase in the number of participants looking for meaningful roles to play. It is obvious that disasters create genuine human needs. Responses to these needs create further demands for personnel, equipment, transportation, and communications facilities, and for organizational and coordinative mechanisms to mobilize disaster-relevant resources. What is not obvious is the degree to which present international disaster assistance programs comprise an effective response to disaster-generated needs.⁸

Within the United States, OFDA has taken steps to meet the demands for coordinative mechanisms. In 1974, a new plan was developed for bringing structure to the massive and sometimes indiscriminate humanitarian response of the American public that often follows extensive news media reporting of serious foreign disasters. This new plan provided a means for coordinating the collection, screening, and shipment of relief supplies from communities throughout the country. State Governors have appointed foreign disaster relief representatives, and the Defense Civil Preparedness Agency, the Red Cross, and volun-

⁷Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, op. cit., p. 8,

⁸Committee on International Disaster Assistance, op. cit., p. 4.

tary agencies have offered the use of their communications systems and disaster-experienced personnel. This plan was activated during the relief effort for the Guatemala earthquake in 1976.

Within the U.S. Government as well, OFDA has coordination responsibilities which have been exercised for several years. Among the agencies that often are involved in relief efforts are:

- Department of Defense (DOD), which transports supplies and provides such specialized services as the construction of bridges, erection of temporary shelter, and the provision of medical care;
- Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), through its Center for Disease Control (CDC), which provides assessment of the immediate medical needs and overall health situation;
- U.S. Geologic Survey (USGS), which provides teams of geologists and volcanologists to assess the extent of earthquake or volcanic damage and the probability of recurrence;
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which provides early warning of storms and has released personnel to develop drought projections;
- Smaller agencies such as the Peace Corps, whose volunteers provide an assessment of needs and, in some cases, assistance.

Internationally, OFDA supports the relief operations of the United Nations, International Committee of the Red Cross, and the League of Red Cross Societies, through cash grants, logistical backup, emergency food, relief supplies, equipment, and personnel. In particular, the United States has been a supporter of the U.N. Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO) since its inception in 1972. Funded primarily by voluntary contributions from U.N. members, UNDRO offers the opportunity to enhance global coordination of disaster relief not only in the role of an international organization but also as a functioning, operational unit. Since late- 1976, a permanent disaster coordi-

nation center in Geneva has served as a central information exchange during emergencies.⁹ The United States, through AID and the State Department, has publicly supported the improvement of this capability and provided funds specifically located to improve UNDRO.¹⁰

U.S. DISASTER PROGRAMS IN REVIEW

A review of disaster programs sponsored by the United States is largely a review of OFDA. As the chief agent of the Government's response to disaster-related needs around the world, OFDA has sought to coordinate the many government and private voluntary resources of the United States. During its 15 years of existence, OFDA has coordinated this response to over 500 disasters and has formalized the response procedures used in U.S. missions in foreign countries. OFDA has established stockpiles at four locations worldwide and has created procedures to speed the delivery of these and other disaster-related goods and services. Moreover, OFDA has undertaken efforts to apply science and technology to foreign disaster preparedness and relief and has launched significant efforts in disaster preparedness planning through both direct technical assistance and International Disaster Preparedness seminars. It is through the actions of OFDA that the United States has participated in developing countries' disasters, thus offering the potential benefits of such experience to U.S. domestic disaster programs.

⁹United Nations Disaster Relief Organization, *UNDRO Newsletter*, Number 3 (May 1977), pp. 1-2.

¹⁰Department of State and Agency for International Development comments in Reports to the Congress by the Comptroller General of the U.S., *Need for an International Disaster Relief Agency* (Washington, D. C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, May 1976) and *Observations on the Guatemala Earthquake Relief Effort* (Washington, D. C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, August 1976).