

**Major Functional Series 200 Program Assistance  
ADS 251 - International Disaster Assistance**

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## Major Functional Series 200 Program Assistance ADS 251 - International Disaster Assistance

### 251.1 Authority

1. [Foreign Assistance Act \(FAA\) of 1961, as amended, Chapter 9 - International Disaster Assistance](#)
2. [The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, Sections 491 - 494, as amended.](#)
3. Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies (dated September 15, 1993): Designation of the USAID Administrator as the Special Coordinator for International Disaster Assistance

### 251.2 Objective

The objective of this chapter is to identify the policies, **general** procedures, responsibilities and definitions for effectively managing USAID's Foreign Disaster Assistance program. **Specific and detailed information is provided in BHR/OFDA's annually issued "Guidance Cable."**

To provide guidelines for planning, achieving and monitoring progress and effectiveness of **disaster** assistance **and transition** activities funded by the [International Disaster Assistance \(IDA\) account](#) and other USAID funding which may be designated for this purpose.

Programs administered by the Bureau for Humanitarian Response.

### 251.3 Responsibility

1. USAID Administrator: The USAID Administrator is ultimately responsible to the President for the conduct of all aspects of USG international disaster assistance.
2. Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Humanitarian Response (AA/BHR):

The Assistant Administrator, BHR is responsible for defining Agency-wide disaster assistance policy and strategy and ensuring that approved policy and procedures are preserved in USAID's conduct of the international disaster assistance program. The AA/BHR delegates responsibility for operational effectiveness and accountability to the Director, Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).

3. Director, Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA): The OFDA Director is responsible for planning, achieving, monitoring and evaluating performance of all aspects related to emergency humanitarian response of the USG's International Disaster Assistance program under authorities delegated by the USAID Administrator through the Assistant Administrator for Humanitarian Response. The OFDA Director is the allottee for the activities of the International Disaster Assistance account authorized under Sections 491 and 492 of the FAA.

Transition Initiatives activities are managed by the Office of Transition Initiatives.

4. Field Operations: The Chief of the U.S. Mission bears responsibility for the conduct of USG foreign disaster assistance within their jurisdiction. Unless otherwise specified, oversight responsibility and accountability rests with the U.S. Mission. Chiefs of Missions are responsible for **ensuring** that up-to-date disaster plans are operational in the Mission and that Mission Disaster Relief Officers are appointed and perform designated duties, below.

Responsibility for fiscal management of OFDA field operations shall be redelegated by the Director, OFDA, as appropriate, to the following entities in the field when such redelegation shall serve substantially to expedite **IDA-support** activities.

The USAID Mission Director or U.S. Ambassador may be delegated authority and responsibility for specified activities in response to declared disasters. OFDA Regional Disaster Advisors are delegated broad management responsibility for programs in the field, which responsibility may, when specifically authorized, include obligation and disbursement of IDA funds.

The Team Leader of a Disaster Assistance Response Teams (DART) may be so designated when such delegation shall serve to reduce the threat to the lives of disaster victims.

#### 251.4 Definitions (See [ADS Glossary](#))

Ambassador's authority  
complex emergency  
disaster  
disaster declaration  
disaster reconstruction  
disaster rehabilitation  
disaster relief

International Disaster Assistance (IDA) account  
notwithstanding clause  
Prevention, Mitigation and Preparedness (PMP)  
transition initiative

## **251.5 POLICY**

The **statements contained within the .5 section of this ADS chapter** are the official Agency policies and corresponding essential procedure.

### **251.5.1 APPLICABILITY**

The policy contained within this chapter shall apply to all activities undertaken with USAID's International Disaster Assistance funds and all entities within USAID and their partners, beneficiaries and stakeholders in the provision of disaster assistance.

#### **E251.5.1 Applicability**

The Essential Procedures contained within this chapter shall apply to all activities undertaken by OFDA using International Disaster Assistance funds and all entities within USAID and their partners, beneficiaries and stakeholders in the provision of disaster assistance furnished by USAID.

### **251.5.2 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE (SO) TEAMS**

The Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) is the primary operating unit within the U.S. Government for the conduct of International Disaster Assistance with respect to international disaster assistance. OFDA shall establish teams for **achieving the** strategic objective defined in the BHR Strategic Plan. (See Supplementary Reference BHR/OFDA Strategic Plan. This document is available in hardcopy from The Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).)

#### **E251.5.2 Strategic Objective (SO) Teams**

Teams shall be established to plan, monitor and evaluate **the following**:

(SO-1) Increased adoption of mitigation measures in countries prone to natural and man-made disasters.

(SO-2) Critical needs met of targeted vulnerable groups in declared disaster situations.

The teams shall be composed of operating unit staff and others as appropriate and feasible.

OFDA shall establish authorities and responsibilities governing the teams' modes of operation.

### 251.5.3 **PRINCIPLES FOR DEVELOPING AND MANAGING DISASTER ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES**

Humanitarian concern shall be the overriding principle in developing and managing disaster assistance programs, consistent with authorizing legislation. All efforts shall be made to ensure that timely and appropriate assistance is efficiently delivered to the neediest victims. OFDA may use the [notwithstanding clause](#) where necessary to deliver disaster assistance on a timely basis.

- a) Disaster Relief: Upon the declaration of a disaster (**See [ADS Glossary](#)**) it is USG policy to provide humanitarian assistance to needy victims of foreign disasters regardless of nationality, race, ethnicity or political or religious persuasion. Disaster relief is intended to **address immediate life threatening concerns**.
- b) Disaster Rehabilitation and Reconstruction: USAID provides [disaster rehabilitation](#) for disaster stricken communities in order to (1) **assist a community's return** to a state of viability; (2) reduce the vulnerability of a community to future disasters. Reconstruction, most commonly administered by USAID's regional bureaus and overseas missions, may be managed by BHR offices in transitional situations. Rehabilitation and Reconstruction are secondary and tertiary objectives, respectively, to Relief, which addresses OFDA's primary goal: saving lives and reducing human suffering.
- c) Prevention, Mitigation and Preparedness: Recognizing the benefits in lives and dollars saved, USAID provides assistance to reduce the **risks to vulnerable** people and economic assets **posed by** natural and man-made hazards.

### E251.5.3 **Principles for Developing and Managing Disaster Assistance Activities**

- a) Disaster Relief
  1. Disaster Declaration: U.S. Ambassadors shall have the option of requesting authorization from BHR/OFDA to commit up to \$25,000 of IDA funds upon the written determination that a disaster exists in the host country which meets three criteria: it is of a magnitude with which the affected community cannot cope;

recognized representatives of the affected population desire the assistance; and it is in the USG's interests to respond.

2. [\*\*Ambassador's Authority\*\*](#): Requests by the overseas mission under the \$25,000 authority are contingent upon a fund citation issued by USAID/W, usually within a few hours of the declaration and request. Any proposed obligations in excess of the \$25,000 limit must also be approved by OFDA. This includes goods and services offered by other Federal agencies, e.g. DOD, which will be charged against the IDA account.

3. Planning: Relief Planning occurs generically and with reference to specific disaster threats. USAID has developed numerous rapid response packages capable of providing commodities and services to meet the exigencies of both natural and man-made disasters. USAID Missions are required to maintain Mission Disaster Relief Plans (ref. 2-FAM-060 and Emergency Action Manual, Chapter 13. [\*\*See also Directive for Strategic Planning: \(201.5.5d\(3\). Emergency Programs in the Field\)\*\*](#)).

4. Early Warning: USAID maintains, in conjunction with other Federal agencies and international organizations, numerous technological and ground-based systems to provide early warning for impending natural and man-made disasters.

5. Assessment: Beyond the initial \$25,000, OFDA responds to emergencies under the International Disaster Assistance account based upon assessments by USAID, other USG field personnel, recognized international organizations and other sources which are known to be credible. USAID/W offers assessment resources from its own and partner personnel in the case of significant disasters or their threats.

6. Partnerships:

Bureau for Humanitarian Response: The Offices of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), Food for Peace and Transition Initiatives shall work in close partnership to assure the most expeditious and efficient achievement of desired results.

USAID Regional Bureaus and Central Offices: OFDA shall cooperate with the regional bureaus and USAID central offices to facilitate the maintenance of or expeditious return to sustainable development in disaster affected or threatened countries.

Other USG Agencies: OFDA shall maintain partnerships with other Federal agencies which have mandates and resources which can enhance disaster operations. Numerous disaster response activities are enhanced by coordination with and support of State/PRM, DOD, USPHS, USDA, **FEMA, NOAA, USGS**, etc.

Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): OFDA's primary operating partners are PVOs/NGOs, which have presence in affected countries and experience with disasters, emergency food assistance and transition initiatives. PVOs/NGOs are not required to be registered with the Agency to receive grants under the IDA account. OFDA also operates through indigenous NGOs when appropriate.

International Organizations: The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the operational UN agencies (UNICEF, WFP, UNDHA, UNDP, UNHCR, etc.) are frequently partners in wide scale or complex disasters.

Other Donors: OFDA often takes the initiative in encouraging other humanitarian donor countries to accept a fair share of responsibility for mounting large scale relief efforts, especially where their political and economic interests are high.

#### 7. Termination of Assistance:

While it may be within the interests of the operational unit, all partners and ultimate recipients that a return to development be accomplished as quickly as possible, the nature of complex emergencies precludes this in most cases. OFDA remains dedicated to ending its assistance whenever the disaster situation has changed to the point that continued assistance is either unnecessary or not possible.

#### b) Disaster Rehabilitation:

Frequently, the provision of life saving [disaster relief](#) fails to meet the affected community's need for returning to a state of viability and resuming productive development. In certain circumstances, OFDA can provide some assistance for rehabilitation, although it is a secondary priority for OFDA. Procedures for rehabilitation mirror those for relief, above.

#### c) Disaster Reconstruction:

Although a tertiary priority and rarely funded with IDA funds, reconstruction is included in the disaster assistance portfolio to ensure expedited action in returning the affected community to **their pre-disaster state**.

d) Disaster [Prevention, Mitigation and Preparedness \(PMP\)](#):

Standard Agency policies and procedures generally govern the implementation of the PMP program with the following exceptions and exclusions. **To the extent possible, disaster relief and PMP programs are mutually reinforcing.**

1. PMP activities usually **address** recognized global or regional disaster threats; **including** instances where U.S. Missions recognize the need for PMP resources with respect to disasters to fulfill or complement their sustainable development goals.
2. PMP activities, e.g. disaster early warning, may be necessary to respond to time-critical needs, and thus require use of the IDA "notwithstanding clause" to protect lives endangered by incipient or predictable events.

#### **251.5.4 OBLIGATION OF USAID FUNDS**

Funds available under the IDA account shall be obligated by the Bureau for Management, Office of Procurement (M/OP) or entities designated by the OFDA Director. (**See [251.3.](#) and [201.5.5d\(3\).](#)**) The "notwithstanding clause" may be used to expedite the delivery of critical **assistance**.

#### **E251.5.4 Obligation of USAID Funds**

Because of the urgency and variable nature of lifesaving relief needs, expedited processes may be required to achieve the Agency's goals. Funds made available through the IDA account may be obligated in the following ways:

- a) Through the established procedures inherent in USAID's Acquisition and Assistance program.
- b) By a U.S. overseas mission, when funds are allocated by OFDA for the purpose, for in-country procurement of goods and services which may be accomplished via grant agreements with local or national governments, PVOs, NGOs and IOs or contracts with commercial entities.



- c) By designated U.S. officials in the field to whom specific authority has been delegated for this purpose.
- d) Via cabled advice of tasking to DoD.

Pre-obligation commitments (letters of intent) against the IDA account may be required to provide disaster assistance on a timely basis. **M/OP, on behalf of OFDA** may issue letters of intent to partner organizations to ensure timely start-up of relief activities in instances where expenditures are required prior to the signing of an approved grant.

## **251.5.5 INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**

BHR/OFDA, in cooperation with other Bureau and Agency offices and missions, and with partner and customer organizations, maintains operational, procurement and financial management data bases to ensure accurate and timely management of USAID resources and the assessment of their impact.

### **E251.5.5 Information Management**

OFDA maintains disaster information files that contain four types of relevant data.

**Historical Data:** Disaster occurrences, commodities and services provided in disaster responses, disaster case reports, situation reports, fact sheets and information bulletins.

**Planning Data:** Budget allocations and narratives, funding and commodity availabilities, lessons learned, stockpile balances and vendor/contact lists.

**Operational Data:** Assessments, country strategies, funding commitments and balances and relief proposals.

**Evaluation Data:** Activity reports, evaluations, after-action reports and audits and audit resolutions.

## **251.6 Supplementary Reference**

Field Operations Guide - This guide is available in hardcopy from the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).

Bureau for Humanitarian Response Strategic Plan. This document is available in hardcopy from The Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).

Disaster History: This document is available in hardcopy from The Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).

OFDA Country Profiles: This document is available in hardcopy from The Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).

**251.7**      **Mandatory Reference - N/A**

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