SUCCESS STORY: THE ASIA FOUNDATION TRAINS RESPONDERS IN THE PACIFIC

Since 1995, USAID/OFDA has supported The Asia Foundation disaster management trainings to improve regional and national capacity to mitigate and respond to disasters in the Pacific. The strength and credibility of the trainings are well known in the region, and several stakeholders have adopted elements of the trainings into standard operations to better prepare for and respond to disasters. The Foundation’s trainings have, for example, significantly strengthened the Fiji Red Cross Society (FRCS), an integral part of the disaster management system in Fiji.

FIJI RED CROSS SOCIETY: A LEADER IN DISASTER RESPONSE

The 1998 Fiji National Disaster Management Act mandates that FRCS provide non-food items to affected populations during a disaster, placing FRCS at the forefront of a national response. To operate in the most efficient manner, FRCS relies on a large volunteer base—approximately 300 individuals dispersed throughout the country—to serve as first responders. Due to the strong reliance on volunteers, FRCS grants individuals decision making authority for distribution of relief supplies, which necessitates a well-trained staff and method for obtaining information.

THE ASIA FOUNDATION: TRAININGS IMPROVE DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Poor response capacity during the 2003 cyclone season highlighted the need for improved training of volunteers by FRCS personnel. As a result, FRCS implemented a training program based on the USAID/OFDA supported trainings implemented by The Asia Foundation. In particular, the Initial Damage Assessment (IDA) training has revolutionized the way volunteers collect data during a response; what was once an ad hoc effort is now systemized and comprehensive.

To improve volunteer assessment capacity, FRCS adopted IDA forms, introduced by The Asia Foundation, for use throughout the country. IDA forms provide a tool for data collection, management, and analysis of the humanitarian situation and emergency humanitarian needs. Red Cross societies throughout the region have also adopted the forms, reinventing the way disaster response is conducted and creating a standardized methodology.

FLOOD RESPONSE: TRAINING IN ACTION

In January 2009, flooding in Fiji claimed 11 lives, damaged homes, and destroyed agricultural land. FRCS acted as the first responder to the disaster, assisting more than 41,000 individuals in more than 400 flood-affected villages. During the response, USAID/OFDA provided support to FRCS for the provision of emergency relief commodities and replenishment of stockpiles.
The FRCS Disaster Coordinator reported that the use of IDA forms during the response allowed community responders to make quick and educated decisions, ensuring the provision of vital life-saving assistance. Through the trainings, The Asia Foundation built the response capacity of a USAID/OFDA implementing partner during the flood response.

The use of FRCS emergency response teams across district lines was first implemented during the 2009 flood response. The response teams from less-affected areas provided support to response teams that experienced heavy flooding. According to the FRCS Disaster Coordinator, the trainings have facilitated the creation of a vital network of responders who all speak the same technical "language." This language allows districts to call on less affected districts for support without the burden of elaborating on the operational needs when time is of critical value. The trainings have created a greater efficiency of resources and competency in field, saving lives in the process.

**DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN FIJI: LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING AHEAD**

Successes associated with The Asia Foundation trainings come in several different forms; improved methodology, a common disaster management language, and a greater network of responders illustrate only a few. The Foundation’s trainings have been integral in the creation of a new business of disaster management, allowing individuals to remain in a career track and develop skills in a field that did not exist decades ago. Several trainers from The Asia Foundation now hold key positions in government and international organizations throughout the Pacific, speaking to the strength of the trainings for personal and professional development. In new positions, The Asia Foundation-trained individuals bring new, systematic approaches and analytical skills that can improve the function and procedure of any operation.

FRCS is only one example of the way in which The Asia Foundation trainings have changed disaster management in the Pacific. The Asia Foundation continues to develop trainings to address identified needs, train new generations of responders, and support capacity-building exercises in the Pacific.