SUCCESS STORY:
THE ASIA FOUNDATION BUILDS CAPACITY IN THE PACIFIC

The Pacific Islands each have a unique culture but share a commonality—geography. The Pacific Islands geography results in the islands being among the most disaster prone regions in the world. To mitigate the effects of disasters throughout the region, USAID/OFDA has supported The Asia Foundation disaster management trainings since 1995. The trainings have addressed the challenge of changing standard operations and thinking to improve disaster management through both regional and national level engagement.

THE PACIFIC: DEVELOPMENT OF DISASTER MANAGEMENT

The Asia Foundation was integral in introducing disaster management methodologies to the Pacific. Formal disaster management systems did not exist in the Pacific prior to the introduction of The Asia Foundation regional training programs. The development of the field has facilitated both national and regional level disaster preparedness and mitigation activities, resulting in a proactive rather than reactive approach to disaster management.

Key concepts based on these trainings have been adopted into standard protocol in the region. Red Cross Societies throughout the Pacific adopted Initial Damage Assessment (IDA) forms as a result of IDA training. The Government of Fiji is currently adapting the IDA form to meet its own sectoral needs. Standard operating procedures for national emergency operations centers (EOCs) are based on The Asia Foundation’s EOC management trainings. In addition, language and protocol incorporated into disaster management legislation originates from the Foundation’s trainings.

TRAINING LONGEVITY: A REPUTATION DEVELOPED

With USAID/OFDA support, The Asia Foundation has conducted the longest-running disaster management training programs in the Pacific. Several regional actors indicate that one of the key strengths of the program is the longevity, with which comes an understanding by The Asia Foundation that developing new ways of thinking and operating is not an overnight process. The Foundation’s long-term regional commitment and disaster management expertise are vital components to overcoming challenges and ensuring that new generations of responders develop the competency and ability to operate in difficult situations. The commitment of The Asia Foundation is also significant given the nature of government structures in the Pacific, which result in high staff turnover and often places individuals with little disaster-related experience in the disaster management field.
Longevity does not mean that the programs have remained stagnant. The Asia Foundation trainings have evolved over the years based on identified needs and have been tailored to the country and individuals involved in the training. The Asia Foundation initiated Introduction to Disaster Management (IDM) training in 1995 to bring a broader understanding of the field to the region. During the course of the trainings, The Asia Foundation staff indentified a gap associated with an actual mechanism with which to conduct assessments. As a result, the Foundation developed IDA training and, more recently, has implemented the EOC management training, a highly technical course that provides guidelines for the establishment of emergency centers during a disaster. The trainings undergo constant scrutiny and revision to ensure the highest possible quality—quality that has made the trainings well-known and respected throughout the region.

**THE ASIA FOUNDATION: SUPPORTING REGIONAL DISASTER COORDINATION**

The Asia Foundation works in cooperation with the Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC), a 21-country organization responsible for regional coordination during a disaster. Through disaster management trainings designed to increase response capacity, the Foundation supports SOPAC community risk programs focused on building local capacity to mitigate and respond to disasters. By working through the regional structure, The Asia Foundation ensures an integrated approach to disaster management with local stakeholders. The Foundation is not just an element of disaster response, but part of a much broader disaster management regional strategy.

**A LEADER AMONG LEADERS: TRAINING FUTURE DISASTER MANAGERS**

Local government representatives and international organization leaders agree that Kathryn Hawley, The Asia Foundation’s program director of USAID/OFDA’s Pacific Disaster Risk Management Program, is a driving force behind the success of the training programs. Involved with the trainings since 1995, Hawley brings a recognized consistency and professionalism to the program, as well as 37 years of Pacific knowledge and experience.

Hawley is also in the business of helping to identify and nurture new disaster management leaders. The trainings aim to build capacity in the Pacific by engaging new instructors in disaster management. These instructors then act as training facilitators. Hawley has developed a network of instructors throughout the Pacific who now hold several key positions in government and relief agencies. The former director of the National Disaster Management Office in Fiji, who now serves as Commissioner of the Western Division, highlights the value of looking at the trigger and not just the problem, which is a new way of thinking developed through the The Asia Foundation trainings.

The Foundation’s trainings continue to change mindsets and perceptions in the Pacific, leading to an examination of the disaster management status quo and adoption of new, systemized approaches to disaster management. The ongoing demand for trainings by governments throughout the region is a testament to the value and quality associated with the courses and their delivery methodology.