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Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA)
East Asia and Pacific Region, Regional Office for Asia-Pacific, Bangkok, Thailand

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

USAID/OFDA Co-Sponsors Urban Search and Rescue Exercise in Indonesia

From May 29 to June 1, USAID/OFDA partnered with the China Earthquake Administration to co-fund an urban search and rescue (USAR) simulation in Padang, Indonesia, aimed at improving regional USAR capacity. The exercise was organized by the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG), which holds regional training events around the world to strengthen the effectiveness and coordination of international USAR activities.

Exercise participants included disaster management personnel from more than 20 countries throughout Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, as well as the U.N. Country Team in Indonesia and other U.N. entities. Delegates from Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states Brunei, Burma, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand also participated in the exercise. Representing USAID/OFDA, 10 USAR professionals from the Los Angeles County and Fairfax County fire and rescue departments participated in the exercise, along with USAID/OFDA's USAR program manager, who served as an INSARAG exercise controller.



Representatives from the U.S., China, Indonesia, and the U.N. gather at the INSARAG Asia Pacific Regional Earthquake Response Exercise in Padang, Indonesia. (Photo by Harlan Hale, USAID/OFDA)

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DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

VDAP Partnership Improves Volcano Monitoring in Indonesia

To help Indonesian officials stay abreast of developments at active volcanoes in Central and East Java and Bali, three teams from the USAID/OFDA-supported Volcano Disaster Assistance Program (VDAP) traveled to Indonesia from April 17 to June 1 to build the monitoring and data analysis capacity of the Indonesia Center for Volcanology and Geological Hazard Mitigation (CVGHM). Implemented by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), VDAP provides technical assistance to national volcano monitoring agencies worldwide. When volcanoes show signs of increased activity, VDAP scientists work, by host government invitation, with national counterparts to analyze volcano-monitoring data to determine the risk of eruption and whether evacuations may be warranted.

During the visit, VDAP and CVGHM installed global positioning system sensors on Mt. Agung in Bali that will detect minute movements on the volcano's surface and transmit data for joint analysis by CVGHM and VDAP to help determine if magma might be rising below the surface. In Central Java, CVGHM and VDAP installed gas sensors on Mt. Dieng to detect changes in the composition of gas emissions from the volcano. In East Java, the teams placed seismic monitors on Mt. Raung and Mt. Ijen. All of these monitoring efforts can help to determine if an eruption might be imminent.

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DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

USAID/OFDA Sponsors ICS Executive Course in Thailand

On May 18, approximately 200 Government of Thailand officials attended a one-day Incident Command System (ICS) Executive Course in Nonthaburi Province, Thailand. ICS is a management framework designed to integrate personnel, equipment, procedures, facilities, and communications during complex events. In partnership with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), USAID/OFDA has provided ICS training in Thailand since 2010. The executive course, led by trainers from USFS and the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency, introduced attendees to ICS, highlighted the importance of interagency coordination during disaster response, and included a practical exercise. In addition, the Director General of Thailand's Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation addressed the attendees. The course coincided with a week-long ICS training course for Thai disaster responders.

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The exercise focused on providing participants with information on how international USAR assistance is requested following an emergency, capabilities required to participate in an international response, and how international teams coordinate in a multi-country response setting. Through the exercise, Indonesia and other participating ASEAN member states improved their ability to conduct and coordinate USAR activities, with the goal of eventually gaining U.N. certification as an international search and rescue team. In addition, the exercise established and strengthened relationships within the international USAR community, facilitating a smoother and more coordinated response when the next disaster requiring international USAR assistance occurs. Lastly, the exercise provided a platform for continued engagement between the U.S., China, ASEAN members, and other relevant actors.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Decreasing Earthquake Risk in Burma

From May 21-25, USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor for East Asia and the Pacific Brian Heidel and two USGS seismologists visited Burma to assess existing earthquake hazard understanding and identify ways to reduce the impact of future earthquakes in the country. The USAID/OFDA-sponsored visit was the first of its kind between USGS

and the Government of Burma (GoB). The U.S. team met with counterparts from the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief, and Resettlement within the



USGS seismologist Dr. Susan Hough presents on seismic microzonation. (Photo by Brian Heidel, USAID/OFDA)

GoB, the Myanmar Earthquake Commission, the Myanmar Engineering Society, U.N. agencies, and non-governmental organizations. The team also visited earthquake professionals and officials in Thailand and Vietnam to explore the possibility of facilitating partnerships between earthquake professionals in Burma and colleagues in Southeast Asia. The visit culminated with a half-day Earthquake Preparedness Planning workshop, which was well attended by GoB officials.

Through meetings and site visits, the U.S. team identified high-priority potential program activities based on the interests and needs expressed by officials and technical specialists in Burma, as well as ascertained ways to enhance Burma's earthquake preparedness. Most importantly, the visit laid the foundation for future collaboration between the U.S. and GoB aimed at decreasing earthquake risk in Burma.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Visit Strengthens USAID/OFDA's Partnerships in the Pacific Islands

During the month of June, USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor for East Asia and the Pacific Ben Hemingway traveled to Fiji, Vanuatu, and the Solomon Islands, where he reviewed the progress of ongoing USAID/OFDA disaster risk reduction activities, met with a wide range of stakeholders to determine disaster preparedness and disaster response needs, and liaised with regional U.S. Government officials on current and future disaster response and risk reduction planning for the region. Highlights of the trip included meetings with new leadership at the U.S. Embassy in Suva, the National Disaster Management Office in Vanuatu, and a wide range of USAID/OFDA implementing partners, including the Asia Foundation, OCHA, Save the Children, and multiple Red Cross societies. The trip strengthened USAID/OFDA's partnerships and laid the foundation for future disaster risk reduction investment in the region.



A USAID/OFDA-funded evacuation center in Vanuatu (Photo by Ben Hemingway, USAID/OFDA)

VDAP Partnership Improves Volcano Monitoring in Indonesia

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While the VDAP team was in country, North Sulawesi's Mt. Lokon erupted briefly. VDAP-provided equipment detected increased seismic activity prior to the eruption and instantly transmitted the data to a regional monitoring station and to CVGHM's headquarters in Bandung, West Java. This early warning information enabled the declaration of an exclusion zone of sufficient size to prevent any injuries or deaths.

The partnership between USAID/OFDA, USGS, and CVGHM continues to provide much-needed early warning for volcanic eruptions, enabling USAID/OFDA to meet a key aspect of its mandate: to save lives.

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