

VII. Recommendations

A. To Promote Rapid Response

1. Attention to Early Warnings

Special attention is required to promote "early listening" to early warnings of disaster, both within disaster threatened countries and among bilateral and multilateral donors. A USAID mission can promote press coverage and mobilize donors to energize the government and their own response mechanisms. It is the countries themselves, however, that must establish effective systems to communicate warnings to decision-making levels of government and to mobilize appropriate action.

2. Assignment of Experienced and Capable Personnel

a. Where personnel with drought experience are not available in USAID field offices dealing with disasters, A.I.D. should transfer or recruit such personnel for placement in the field as rapidly as possible.

b. A.I.D. should also:

- maintain an up-to-date roster of disaster-experienced personnel, covering such factors as their location and availability, experience in disasters and development, areas of geographic and technical expertise, and language capability;
 - consider entering into Indefinite Quantity Contracts to gain ready access to appropriately experienced personnel as needed;
 - support training programs in disaster response and preparedness, exploring the sharing resources and responsibilities with organizations such as the UN's Department of Humanitarian Affairs, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, or other organization that have developed training programs offering particular types of training or geographic expertise; and
 - ensure that such programs are offered to country and donor staff on a continuing basis. In order to create sufficiency broad institution capabilities.
- (End p50)

3. Coordination of Needs Assessments

To the extent that it is necessary for each donor agency to conduct its own assessment, for

reasons of internal credibility, each assessment should, at the least, be coordinated with those of other agencies, in timing and coverage, and ideally in definitions, assumptions and methodology as well.

B. To Promote Efficiency and Effectiveness

1. Adequate Staffing and Operational Resources

To organize an effective response to disaster, A.I.D. should take prompt action to assure that adequate numbers of experienced and capable persons are re-assigned or recruited for responsible offices or task forces in Washington and in the field. Those staff should be supported with adequate space, equipment and support staff to carry out their responsibilities.

2. Logistical Planning and Coordination

For every emergency where substantial movement of commodities will be required, A.I.D. should promote formation of national or regional logistics coordination and operation functions. Any in-country or regional task force will be most effective if it includes both public and private operators as well as government officials with decision making powers.

3. Decentralization of Responsibility

Although USAIDs are likely to deal with central governments on such matters as import agreements and donations of food commodities, they should always explore available means to take advantage of the more effective coordination and management mechanisms that are often possible at provincial and district levels.

4. Prompt Reimbursement to Local Bodies by US. Agencies

A.I.D. and USDA should design a voucher processing system that will reimburse governments and NGOs promptly for costs incurred, as for internal transport and handling of food commodities.

(End p51)

C. To Promote Preparedness through Development-related Activity

1. Improved Methods of Targeting Needy Communities and Households

Through either its disaster preparedness or its development programs, A.I.D. should promote improved analysis of household demography, nutrition status and incomes as a basis for underlying mechanisms to cope with disaster and for targeting food relief. It should also review and consider the various alternative methods of determining the size of required ration

and identifying persons needing food aid that are currently advocated by members of the development community.

Among alternatives for size of ration are:

- adherence to World Health Organization or World Food Program guidelines for a nutritious daily ration:
- reduction of the ration in accordance with understanding of total household resources and coping mechanisms; or, of necessity
- establishment of as large a ration as can be afforded, or is available, considering the geographic extent of need, and encouraging community leaders, extension agents and local NGO representatives to identify the most needy among the individuals or households of each community.

Among alternatives for targeting are:

- blanket aid to any community in which the number of affected persons or households exceeds a certain percentage;
- delivery of food aid to all members of a sub-group (infants, school age children, pregnant or aged persons) whether or not all are equally needy;
- delivery of food aid to one senior female on behalf of a household or sub-household;
- strict adherence to identification of specific needy persons within a household and a community; or
- use of a voucher system for purchase of foods by certain categories of needy persons (as, for example, urban residents).

(End p52)

2. Linkages between Response to Disaster and Structural Adjustment

During the period of response to a disaster, managers of USAID development programs should bear in mind the potential for A.I.D. and other donors to:

- benefit from the data prepared to assess needs and target the response to plan adjustments to programs to address the social dimensions of adjustment; and
- urge government to use the occasion of the disaster take steps toward adjustments that will improve the future outlook for national and household food security.

3. Distinction between Preparedness and Development Activities

A.I.D. should maintain the distinction between the roles of OFDA in preparedness and of USAID missions in the development activities that will make the inhabitants of a country less vulnerable to future disasters.

Among activities suitable to the former role would be establishment of internal institutional structures of public and private sector representatives, identification of resources potentially available for response to disaster, training of human resources and building of analytical and technical capacities of governmental and non-governmental institutions, prepositioning of commodities or equipment, and promotion of legal and technical safeguards.

A number of steps toward development that will be promoted through USAID program strategies will lead toward reduced vulnerability to drought. Among these could be food security policy and measures, on-farm and off-farm capacities for pest-free food storage, crop and livestock production strategies, seed multiplication, reliable water supply, opportunities for education and incomes for women and other members of poor rural and urban households, and nutrition education.

Development projects can, and should, take into consideration the need to establish the foundation in growth and incomes that will enable resistance to, and recovery from, natural disaster. Similarly, recovery programs that are integral to a disaster response, may enhance the potential for future development in affected areas, as when small grains that are more drought tolerant than maize are distributed to farmers who should not have been growing maize in the first instance. Development activities as such, however, should be kept separate from the realm of disaster relief, recovery and preparedness.
(End p53)

VIII. Lessons learned

- Timely and well documented warnings are not always heeded by government officials and donors. A conscious effort is necessary, therefore, to capture the attention of decision makers and stimulate them to action.
- The period between donor pledges and actual delivery of food commodities is so long (the quickest to Zimbabwe from the United States, which was the first and fastest donor was five months) that even if a country reacts promptly to mobilize donor interest reports, it also will have to use its own resources to purchase its earliest requirements

- Traditional procurement procedures are frequently too cumbersome for effective and rapid response to disasters.
- Experienced personnel make a critical difference in the quality and effectiveness of response to a disaster.
- Although cross-sectoral and inter-ministerial action is necessary in case of disaster, designation of a coordinating body at the highest level of government will not necessarily ensure coordinated action. Appointment of such a high level body may empower effective inter-ministerial action but does not guarantee it.
- Implementation of the food relief program demonstrated that, on the whole, decentralized management can improve selectively on the central government systems.
- Without a full understanding of household demography and income strategies, it is difficult to assess accurately the need for relief food. Food relief agencies tend to overestimate requirements, perhaps because of their experience in providing food to refugee camps where no other sources of supply are available, or in longer term more structurally-determined food shortage situation.
- All donor agencies, and most responsible governments, have their own mechanisms for assessing need, monitoring operations and preventing fraud. None have yet become sufficiently aware of the need to modify their procedures in the interest of speed and efficiency in the context of disaster.
- Registers of persons and households needing food relief are subject to inflation in spite of careful design, unless the implementing agency has supplemental information, as from longitudinal household survey data, to verify relative vulnerability of communities and community members.
(End p54)
- Food for work programs do not always fulfill the purposes for which they were established, either to ensure that persons do not receive food for nothing or to accomplish community development projects. A significant factor which mitigates against the success of food for work programs as a disaster relief strategy is that regional/local authorities may not have the capability, or the time during as disaster, to properly design and manage projects that are physically, socially and economically appropriate.