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## ADS Chapter 251

# International Disaster Assistance

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

<a href="#"><u>251.1</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>OVERVIEW</u></a> .....	<a href="#"><u>3</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>251.2</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY</u></a> .....	<a href="#"><u>3</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>251.3</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>POLICY DIRECTIVES AND REQUIRED PROCEDURES</u></a> ....	<a href="#"><u>4</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>251.3.1</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Development Objective (DO) Teams</u></a> .....	<a href="#"><u>4</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>251.3.2</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Principles for Developing and Managing Disaster Assistance Activities</u></a> .....	<a href="#"><u>5</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>251.3.3</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Obligation of USAID Funds</u></a> .....	<a href="#"><u>7</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>251.3.4</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Information Management</u></a> .....	<a href="#"><u>8</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>251.4</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>MANDATORY REFERENCE</u></a> .....	<a href="#"><u>8</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>251.4.1</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>External Mandatory Reference</u></a> .....	<a href="#"><u>9</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>251.4.2</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Internal Mandatory References</u></a> .....	<a href="#"><u>9</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>251.5</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>ADDITIONAL HELP</u></a> .....	<a href="#"><u>9</u></a>
<a href="#"><u>251.6</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>DEFINITIONS</u></a> .....	<a href="#"><u>9</u></a>

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

### **251.1 OVERVIEW**

Effective Date: 05/01/1997

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 DCHA/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.

### **251.2 PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES**

Effective Date: 05/01/1997

- a. The **USAID Administrator** is ultimately responsible to the President for the conduct of all aspects of USG international disaster assistance.
- b. The **Assistant Administrator, Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance (AA/DCHA)** 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/DCHA delegates responsibility for operational effectiveness and accountability to the Director, Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).
- c. The **Director, Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)** 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.

- d. 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 must be redelegated by the Director, OFDA, as appropriate, to the following entities in the field when such redelegation must serve substantially to expedite IDA-support activities.

**e.** 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.

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

### **251.3 POLICY DIRECTIVES AND REQUIRED PROCEDURES**

Effective Date: 05/01/1997

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

The essential procedures contained within this chapter must apply to all activities undertaken by OFDA using International Disaster Assistance (IDA) funds and all entities within USAID and their partners, beneficiaries and stakeholders in the provision of disaster assistance furnished by USAID.

#### **251.3.1 Development Objective (DO) Teams**

Effective Date: 01/21/2011

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 must establish teams for achieving its strategic objectives.

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

- (DO-1) Increased adoption of mitigation measures in countries prone to natural and man-made disasters.
- (DO-2) Critical needs met of targeted vulnerable groups in declared disaster situations.

The teams must be composed of Operating Unit staff and others as appropriate and feasible.

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OFDA must establish authorities and responsibilities governing the teams' modes of operation. See ADS Chapter 202, regarding USAID Development Objective (DO) Teams managing activities in high threat environments.

### **251.3.2 Principles for Developing and Managing Disaster Assistance Activities**

Effective Date: 12/13/2011

Humanitarian concern must be the overriding principle in developing and managing disaster assistance programs, consistent with authorizing legislation. All efforts must 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. (See [251mac, USAID/DCHA Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance \(OFDA\) Guidance for Disaster Planning and Response – FY 2011](#))

#### **a) Disaster Relief**

**(1) Disaster Declaration:** The Chiefs of Mission will have the option of requesting authorization from DCHA/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) Chief of Mission'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.

For more information, see [251mad, USAID/DCHA Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance \(OFDA\) Guidance for Disaster Planning and Response – FY 2012](#).

**(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: \(201.3.5d\(3\), Emergency Programs in the Field\)](#))

**(4) Early Warning:** USAID maintains, in conjunction with other Federal agencies and international organizations, numerous technological and ground-

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

**USAID Regional Bureaus and Independent Offices:** OFDA must 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 must 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, UNHCR, 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

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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.

**251.3.3 Obligation of USAID Funds**

Effective Date: 05/01/1997

Funds available under the IDA account must be obligated by the Management Bureau, Office of Acquisition and Assistance (M/OAA) 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.

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.

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- 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/OAA, 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.

### **251.3.4 Information Management**

Effective Date: 05/01/1997

DCHA/OFDA, in cooperation with other Missions, Bureaus and Independent Offices (B/IOs), 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.

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.

## **251.4 MANDATORY REFERENCES**

### **251.4.1 External Mandatory Reference**

Effective Date: 05/01/1997

- a. [The Foreign Assistance Act \(FAA\) of 1961, as amended, Chapter 9 - International Disaster Assistance](#)

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- b. [The Foreign Assistance Act \(FAA\) of 1961, Sections 491 - 494, as amended.](#)
- c. 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

#### **251.4.2 Internal Mandatory References**

Effective Date: 12/13/2011

- a. [ADS 251mac, USAID/DCHA Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance \(OFDA\) Guidance for Disaster Planning and Response – FY 2011](#)
- b. [ADS 251mad, USAID/DCHA Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance \(OFDA\) Guidance for Disaster Planning and Response – FY 2012](#)

#### **251.5 ADDITIONAL HELP**

Effective Date: 05/01/1997

- a. Field Operations Guide - This guide is available in hardcopy from the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).
- b. Bureau for Humanitarian Response Strategic Plan. This document is available in hardcopy from The Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).
- c. Disaster History: This document is available in hardcopy from The Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).
- d. OFDA Country Profiles: This document is available in hardcopy from The Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).

#### **251.6 DEFINITIONS**

Effective Date: 05/01/1997

The terms and definitions listed below have been incorporated into the ADS Glossary. See the [ADS Glossary](#) for all ADS terms and definitions.

##### **complex emergency**

A disaster, usually of long term duration, that includes a combination of humanitarian, political and military dimensions which hinders the provision of external relief.  
(Chapter 251)

##### **disaster**

An unexpected occurrence, manmade or natural, that causes loss of life, health, property or livelihood, inflicting widespread destruction and distress and having long-term, adverse effects on Agency operations. It is distinguished from an accident by its magnitude and by its damage to the community infrastructure or the resources required for recovery. (Chapters 251, [502, 511, 530](#))

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**disaster declaration**

The written determination by a U.S. Ambassador or designee of the Secretary of State that a disaster situation exists, with lives at risk, which exceeds local capacity and for which it is in the U.S. Government's interest to respond. (Chapter 251)

**disaster reconstruction**

Longer term activities designed to augment critical infrastructure and promote development goals; of tertiary priority to Disaster Relief and Rehabilitation. (Chapter 251)

**disaster rehabilitation**

Intermediate term activities to assist disaster stricken populations to return to a state of viability. A secondary priority to life sustaining Disaster Relief. (Chapter 251)

**disaster relief**

Immediate, life sustaining assistance provided to disaster victims. (Chapter 251)

**International Disaster Assistance (IDA) account**

Funding source for OFDA administered disaster responses, authorized in Sections 491-492 of the FAA. (Chapter 251)

**notwithstanding clause**

The exclusionary clause in the IDA legislation which allows USAID to use IDA funds for disaster relief, rehabilitations and reconstruction notwithstanding any other provision of law. This clause permits USAID to use expedited processes in the provision of assistance to disaster victims. (See Supplementary References, FAA, Chapter 9, Section 491). (Chapter 251)

**Prevention, Mitigation and Preparedness (PMP)**

Actions taken to reduce disaster risks to actual or potential victims. PMP activities include strengthening the physical environment, reducing chronic threats to agriculture, training in disaster management and other actions designed to eliminate or moderate the effects of disasters. (Chapter 251)

**transition initiative**

A set of actions intended to facilitate stability and strengthen democratic institutions in nations that have suffered political, economic or social upheaval. These actions are not conducted by OFDA. (Chapter 251)

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