

USAID/OFDA PROGRAM SUMMARY

FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA, REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS, AND PALAU

CONTEXT

In November 2008, USAID assumed responsibility for disaster response and reconstruction in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), reflecting the transition of FSM and RMI from U.S.-administered trust territories to independent nations. Under this new arrangement, FEMA provides USAID with funding to conduct response and reconstruction activities following a U.S. presidential disaster declaration, and USAID maintains FEMA's previous commitment to supplement host government efforts to provide humanitarian assistance in the event of a significant disaster. To provide a framework for U.S. Government (USG) disaster response and reconstruction in FSM and RMI under this hybrid agreement, USAID and FEMA developed an Operational Blueprint, which guides coordination between the two agencies. USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) collaborates closely with FEMA, as well as with USAID/Philippines and USAID's Bureau for Asia, to implement programs in FSM and RMI. In Palau, USAID/OFDA responds to disasters through its normal disaster response mechanisms.

An important pillar of USAID's disaster mitigation, relief, and reconstruction program in FSM and RMI is a cooperative agreement between USAID and its primary relief and reconstruction partner in the two countries, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which maintains offices in Pohnpei and Yap states, FSM, and Majuro, RMI. USAID also maintains a full-time presence in FSM and RMI through a Disaster Assistance Coordinator (DAC). Located in Majuro and working as a member of the U.S. Embassy country teams in FSM and RMI, the DAC liaises with host governments and coordinates USG relief activities in FSM and RMI. USAID recently established a position for a Reconstruction Assistance Coordinator based at USAID/Philippines, who helps USAID fulfill the reconstruction component of its mandate as specified in the Operational Blueprint.

RECENT RESPONSE ACTIVITIES

- **Typhoon Haiyan Response in Palau:** On November 7, 2013, Super Typhoon Haiyan passed over Kayangel, the northernmost state of Palau, bringing heavy rains and sustained winds that resulted in significant damage to houses, infrastructure, and agricultural land and displaced an estimated 1,500 people to temporary shelters. On November 9, U.S. Chargé d'Affaires, a.i., Thomas E. Daley declared a disaster in Palau due to the effects of Super Typhoon Haiyan. In response, USAID/OFDA provided \$100,000 to the Palau Red Cross Society (PRCS) to procure and distribute emergency relief commodities.
- **Drought Response in RMI:** Drier-than-normal weather conditions that began in early 2013 resulted in a severe drought in the northern and western atolls and islands of RMI, causing critical shortages of safe drinking water and damage to food crops. On June 14, U.S. President Barack Obama declared a disaster for RMI, authorizing the release of federal funding for emergency relief and reconstruction assistance and representing the first presidential disaster declaration since USAID assumed responsibility for disaster response and reconstruction in FSM and RMI. In response, USAID/OFDA deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART), activated a corresponding Washington, D.C.-based Response Management Team, and supported the distribution of safe drinking water, food supplies, and emergency relief commodities to affected populations using funding provided by FEMA. USAID/OFDA led USG relief efforts, coordinating with the U.S. Embassy in Majuro, USAID/Philippines, USAID's Bureau for Asia, FEMA, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service, which is procuring and delivering food commodities for the drought response, as well as the Government of RMI and humanitarian partners, to ensure a timely and appropriate response.
- **Operational Blueprint Revision:** In November 2013, staff from USAID and FEMA met to revise the Operational Blueprint that guides the hybrid USAID-FEMA agreement for assistance in FSM and RMI, which mandates a revision every five years. Participants discussed and agreed upon revisions to the document to

improve the timeliness and effectiveness of USG disaster response in FSM and RMI, particularly using lessons learned from the recent drought response in RMI. USAID and FEMA also mapped the disaster response and reconstruction process, outlining national government, USAID, and FEMA actions for each stage of a likely disaster to improve coordination and define roles and responsibilities.

ONGOING DISASTER RISK REDUCTION (DRR) AND PRE-POSITIONING PROGRAMS

- **Enhancing Disaster Management Capacity in FSM, Palau, and RMI:** The Pacific Island countries of FSM, Palau, and RMI are vulnerable to a number of natural hazards, including drought, floods, and tropical storms. The Micronesia Red Cross Society (MRCS), PRCS, and RMI National Volunteer Group—supported by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies—partner with local government agencies, businesses, and communities to build awareness of disaster response activities and cultivate a knowledgeable volunteer base for emergency responses. USAID/OFDA has provided \$260,000 to support the preparedness and mitigation activities of the MRCS, PRCS, and RMI National Volunteer Group.
- **Weather Alerts for Remote Communities in FSM and RMI:** While some communities in the outer islands of FSM and RMI have a means of receiving warnings for typhoons, tsunamis, and other extreme hydrometeorological events, limited electricity often thwarts their ability to use primary communications systems 24 hours a day. Other communities lack access to sophisticated communications devices and remain unaware as storms approach. To address this situation, USAID/OFDA has contributed \$300,000 to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to provide an alert system for climate, weather, and other warnings in remote locations in FSM and RMI. Developed by the USAID/OFDA-funded Radio and Internet for the Dissemination of Hydrometeorological Information project, this messaging system connects meteorological authorities with emergency managers when a hydrometeorological event is imminent and evacuations may be necessary. The system's terminals are designed to operate in remote and environmentally harsh environments and do not require a consistent energy source to function.
- **Homeowner Handbook to Prepare for Natural Disasters in RMI:** USAID/OFDA has provided approximately \$83,000 to support NOAA in modifying the Homeowner Handbook to Prepare for Natural Disasters—originally developed for residents of Hawaii—to specifically target vulnerable populations in RMI. Providing technical information in an easy-to-understand format, the handbook educates homeowners on hazard risks in the community, collecting emergency supplies, evacuation planning, and preparing residences for hazard events, such as high winds, rain, and flooding, in an effort to reduce casualties and property damage resulting from natural disasters.
- **Landslide Hazard Prevention in FSM:** Since Fiscal Year (FY) 2011, USAID/OFDA has provided the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) with nearly \$147,000 to conduct landslide susceptibility assessments in FSM in order to reduce risks associated with landslides, a common hazard during typhoon season. By identifying potential hazards, developing hazard maps, and formulating landslide-avoidance plans, the project is enabling the development of early warning mechanisms that alert populations to seek safe shelter during periods of intense rainfall.
- **Pacific Islands Disaster Risk Management Program 2 (PDRMP-2):** Implemented by The Asia Foundation (TAF), PDRMP-2 aims to improve the capacity and performance of local and national disaster management agencies, develop and adapt training materials relevant to the Pacific, and strengthen the capacity of Pacific nations to organize and conduct disaster management courses. USAID/OFDA has provided more than \$2.2 million since the program was initiated in FY 2010 to support national-level trainings in the Cook Islands, FSM, Fiji, RMI, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu, as well as a sub-regional training curriculum development in the eight aforementioned countries and Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, and Tuvalu. In the coming months, PDRMP-2 implementation will transition from TAF to the Secretariat of the Pacific Community's Applied Geoscience and Technology Division, indicating that the program has successfully progressed to a sustainable, ongoing regional effort.
- **Disaster Preparedness in FSM and RMI:** Since FY 2010, USAID/OFDA has supported IOM to pre-position emergency relief supplies in three strategic locations throughout FSM and RMI and develop standby agreements with island-based organizations for logistical support during an emergency response, if necessary.