response and technical specialists and proved to be a valuable operational presence in the field. BHR/OFDA effectively collaborated with DOD to help deliver critical assistance such as water, food, medicines, shelter, and blankets to the millions of people affected by the hurricane. The relief effort is another example of how FY 1999 challenged BHR/OFDA to take on expanded roles in emergency relief efforts. BHR/OFDA was a key player in coordinating the most significant contribution the USG has ever made to a natural disaster.

Civil Strife in Kosovo

In June 1999, a humanitarian crisis developed in Kosovo when tens of thousands of ethnic Albanians tried to return to their homes and villages after fleeing across nearby borders due to violent conflict with Serb forces. Ethnic Albanians returned to find that 365,000 homes had been damaged during the conflict. Winter was fast approaching and an estimated 800,000 people were homeless, creating a shelter crisis unanticipated by the humanitarian relief community. The situation in Kosovo was one of the most complicated complex disasters ever to challenge BHR/OFDA and one that highlighted the Office's ability to adapt itself to longer and more complex operational roles in the field.

Lumber is off-loaded in the BHR/OFDA-funded emergency shelter materials depot in Gjilane (Ferizaj), Kosovo (photo by Jamy Bond, BHR/OFDA).

The immediate and large influx of IDPs back into Kosovo overwhelmed the international relief community. BHR/OFDA took the lead in responding to the crisis. In coordination with the U.S. military and professional contractors, the USAID/DART already present in the field quickly established a logistical supply system that brought needed lumber for roofing into the province by train. Still, NGOs in the field continued to struggle with the enormous need to shelter the Kosovar community. Recognizing that these NGOs were in need of further operational support, the USAID/DART established a centralized depot to receive incoming emergency shelter materials. This logistical operation represented an unusual hands-on role by BHR/OFDA in an effort to provide the support structure necessary for NGO partners to implement their shelter programs before the onset of winter. In effect, BHR/OFDA's depot operations provided emergency shelter assistance to an estimated 6,000 families who otherwise may not have received any assistance.

This increased operational presence in the field has placed greater demands on BHR/OFDA staff in Washington. In FY 1999, the Office established a Washington-based Response Management Team (RMT) to provide sustained support for the increased number, size, and duration of USAID/DARTs. When a disaster hits, BHR/OFDA not only deploys a USAID/DART to the field, but also mobilizes the RMT in Washington to ensure accurate communication, appropriate analysis, quick response to field requests and prompt information dissemination. In addition, the RMT coordinates with BHR/OFDA's partners in Washington on recommendations and decisions, and responds to inquiries from across the USG. The implementation of the RMT structure in Washington parallels that of an operational DART on the ground. In effect, new roles for BHR/OFDA in the coordination and operation of relief activities in the field are reflected by similar roles in Washington.

Prevention, Preparedness, and Mitigation

In FY 1999, the devastation from both natural and complex emergencies focused the international community's attention on the importance of working to prevent and mitigate disaster whenever possible. Preparing vulnerable populations for the likelihood of disasters can significantly decrease the damage and destruction they cause. In addition to the grave human losses that resulted from disasters in Central America, Kosovo, and Turkey, decades of development investments in roads, schools, health clinics, and economic growth were destroyed. The emotional impact and high cost of such losses have, in effect, sensitized public opinion and governments to the need for more disaster mitigation activities. In FY 1999, BHR/OFDA committed itself to addressing this need. The Office expanded in-house expertise and increased its response capability by providing scientific, technical, and analytical knowledge to activities and decision-making.

BHR/OFDA supported an international team of geoscientists in removing dangerous carbon dioxide from Lakes Nyos and Monoun, Cameroon (photo by George Kling, University of Michigan).

In response to an earthquake in Armenia, for example, BHR/OFDA's technical experts worked quickly with local organizations and partners to collect information, determine areas at high risk of future earthquakes, and create maps that were used to make reconstruction efforts more earthquake-resistant. In response to Hurricane Georges in the Dominican Republic, which left 44,000 people homeless, BHR/OFDA funded the use of salvaged timber to provide shelter for the affected population. The program reduced fire hazard potential by lowering fuel loads, limited soil erosion potential, and decreased insect infestation by removing a potential habitat. These successful projects exemplify the value and viability of integrating longer-term disaster mitigation efforts into initial response programming.

A further example of BHR/OFDA's continuing focus on minimizing the impact of future disasters is The Central American Mitigation Initiative (CAMI) announced by President Clinton in March 1999. Over the next three years, $11 million will be invested in activities that increase the ability of Central American governments to forecast, monitor, and respond to natural disasters.

Finally, in September 1999, BHR/OFDA began

an effort geared toward actually preventing a disaster's occurrence. The effort involved a degassing program in Cameroon created to mitigate the effects of carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions from two volcanic lakes, which killed 1,800 people in 1984 and 1986 and now threaten 10,000 more. The University of Michigan deployed a scientific team to Cameroon to install a system that uses slow, controlled removal of CO_2 gas from lake waters as a simple and effective means of keeping gas emissions from reaching dangerous levels.

In addition to expanding in-house technical expertise, BHR/OFDA has spent the past decade working to maximize USG emergency response capacity by increasing its cooperation with other USG offices. Since 1990, the number of formal relationships between BHR/OFDA and agencies such as the USGS, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, USDA, U.S. Public Health Services, and USFS has grown significantly. Each partnership offers BHR/OFDA direct access to staff with a range of technical expertise on both a short- and long-term basis. Staff members from various USG agencies and universities rotate through the Office as fully integrated team participants, for months and even years at a time.The result is a continual, on-site cadre of experts with disaster experience who contribute to BHR/OFDA's support for relief initiatives and programs aimed at mitigation.

Conclusion

While its primary mandate of saving lives and reducing human suffering remains the same, BHR/OFDA has evolved to keep up with a changing world FY 1999 marks BHR/OFDA's recognition of the expanded role it has to play in disaster relief. The face of BHR/OFDA today reflects an ability to evolve and maintain effectiveness in a more complex international environment; an ability to mobilize technical resources and build relevant knowledge into emergency relief response; and an emphasis on enhancing prevention, mitigation, and preparedness activities. BHR/OFDA recognizes that adaptability is essential and improvements are imperative to the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. In further anticipation of the challenges to come, BHR/OFDA is already making plans on how to meet them through a continuous review of its efforts, and a broader enhancement of its systems and capabilities.

Prior-Year and Non-Declared Disasters

Activities initiated in response to a disaster declaration often require additional funding for completion in subsequent fiscal years. In FY 1999, BHR/OFDA obligated a total of $259,005 in response to disasters declared in FYs 1998 and 1996.

FY 1998 Carryover

Bangladesh - Floods

Replenishment of water containers and plastic sheeting to stockpile..... **$73,388**

Mexico - Fires

Grant amendment to Government of Mexico to audit OFDA assistance **$5,000**

St. Kitts, Nevis & Anguilla - Hurricane

Replenishment of water containers and plastic sheeting to stockpile and deployment of personnel to assist in communications support and assessments..... **$136,661**

FY 1996 Carryover

Bolivia - Drought

Replenishment of 300-gallon water tanks to stockpile..... **$14,256**

Ecuador - Earthquake

Replenishment of 300-gallon water tanks to stockpile..... **$29,700**

BHR/OFDA Carryover Assistance in FY 1999 ..... **$259,005**

FY 1999 Declared Disasters

Disaster Summaries in this Annual Report

The disaster descriptions on the following pages cover the period of the USG's fiscal year, October 1, 1998 through September 30, 1999. During FY 1999, BHR/OFDA responded to 64 new "declared" disasters.

How a Disaster is Declared

The Chief of the U.S. Mission declares a disaster in the affected country when he or she determines that a disaster exists that warrants a USG response and that is beyond the ability of the host country's response capacity. In the event that a U.S. Mission is not located in the affected country, the appropriate U.S. Assistant Secretary of State may declare a disaster. A disaster cannot be declared without a request from the host country for USG assistance. A disaster declaration allows the Chief of Mission or U.S. Assistant Secretary of State to allocate up to $25,000 (the "Disaster Assistance Authority") for host country relief efforts. BHR/OFDA releases the $25,000 Ambassador's Authority from its International Disaster Account (IDA) and provides the Mission with guidance to determine the need for additional USG assistance. BHR/OFDA sends assessment teams to disaster sites when needed to assist in the verification of relief needs

BHR/OFDA Assistance and Other USG Assistance

Many of the disasters in FY 1999 required a complex mix of USG financial and staff resources. The disaster descriptions include total dollar figures for the assistance provided from BHR/OFDA's IDA, as well as summary information on assistance provided by other USG offices, such as BHR/FFP, BHR/OTI, USDA, DOD, and State/PRM It is not always possible for BHR/OFDA to verify total assistance provided by other USG offices. However, wherever possible, State/PRM and BHR/FFP funding for regional grants, programs, and international appeals are listed separately.

Assistance Provided by U.S. PVOs and the International Community

Information included in the disaster descriptions on assistance provided by U.S. PVOs and the international community is compiled from reports submitted voluntarily to BHR/OFDA. It is not always possible to verify the accuracy of these reports.

Detailed Situation Reports and Fact Sheets on Major Disasters Available Separately

BHR/OFDA produces documents that provide more detailed information about declared disasters than is provided in the case reports found in this annual report. Situation reports are 4-5 page documents updated periodically and written on long-term, complex emergencies. Fact sheets are traditionally one-page documents written on natural disasters and complex emergencies, which eventually may warrant situation reports.

Situation reports or fact sheets were written for the following major disasters in FY 1999:

Bahamas - Hurricane
Colombia - Earthquake
Ethiopia - Drought
Indonesia - Complex Emergency
Kosovo - Complex Emergency
Liberia - Complex Emergency
Sierra Leone - Complex Emergency
Somalia - Drought
Taiwan - Earthquake
Turkey - Earthquake

Note: Historical and current situation reports and fact sheets are available from BHR/OFDA upon request.