

USAID/OFDA: Committed to Assisting the Afghan People

In April 2001, USAID/OFDA deployed two staff members to Afghanistan to assess the effects of a devastating three-year drought and to recommend effective emergency assistance response strategies. The assessment team, the first USG officials to enter Afghanistan since 1998, consisted of a USAID/OFDA health officer, a USAID/OFDA nutritionist, and a refugee officer from State/PRM. The assessment took place in some of Afghanistan's most drought-affected areas, including Herat and Farah provinces in the west, and Balkh, Samangan, and Faryab provinces in the north. The team encountered villagers who were subsisting on only bread mixed with wild grasses, observed barren agricultural fields and dry riverbeds, and listened to stories of how elderly villagers were dying from diseases as they gave up their food for the hungry children. Entire villages were relocating to IDP camps near the cities of Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif. The assessment team concluded that Afghanistan was on the brink of a widespread and precipitous famine.

USAID/OFDA responded to the assessment recommendations by deploying a USAID/DART in June 2001. The USAID/DART facilitated and coordinated the USG's humanitarian response program from Islamabad, Pakistan, the locus for relief agencies operating within Afghanistan. In response to Afghanistan's deepening crisis caused by drought and civil war, USAID/OFDA overcame obstacles, including severe constraints on humanitarian access, to provide nearly \$12.5 million in relief assistance during FY 2001 to vulnerable Afghans and refugees in Pakistan.

USAID/OFDA's emergency relief assistance was part of a three-pronged USG strategy designed to prevent further displacement by assisting residents in their home villages, helping those displaced who had been forced to move to camps and other secure locations, and assisting IDPs in preparing for the eventual return to their homes. USAID/OFDA assistance was part

of the nearly \$183 million USG humanitarian program in Afghanistan during FY 2001. The USG response was the largest amount of humanitarian assistance provided by any donor country.

Even before its greater involvement in FY 2001, USAID/OFDA had been a major provider of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. As deepening civil conflict forced the end of the \$132 million USAID cross-border development program in 1994, USAID/OFDA, USAID/FFP, and State/PRM were the only USG offices able to maintain their assistance programs inside Afghanistan. Between 1994 and 2001, USAID/OFDA provided a total of \$32 million in emergency humanitarian assistance, meeting a wide range of basic needs, including emergency shelter for IDPs, winter heating assistance, support for emergency health programs, and non-food relief commodities. USAID/OFDA assistance was targeted to help Afghans survive the country's deadly mix of poverty, displacement, and civil strife, and it increased significantly as Afghanistan's three-year drought intensified. In addition, USAID/OFDA



A USAID/OFDA assessment team visited IDP shelters in Maslakh Camp, Herat Province (photo by George Havens, USAID/OFDA).

responded to the two earthquakes that devastated parts of northern Afghanistan in 1998.

In the immediate aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, international humanitarian staff withdrew from Afghanistan in anticipation of U.S. reprisal against al Qaeda fighters. The Coalition-led military campaign that commenced in early October eventually resulted in the fall of the

Taliban, and improved humanitarian access to the country. The April 2001 assessment and the presence of the USAID/DART in neighboring Pakistan placed USAID/OFDA in a unique position to take advantage of these historic changes in FY 2002 to improve the condition of the Afghan people and the deteriorated infrastructure.

—Alex Mahoney

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

FLOODS

Three days of heavy rains in late June 2001 caused rivers to overflow and flood areas in Brcko District, Tuzla Canton, and Republika Srpska. In the Brcko District, 1,000 people were evacuated to temporary shelters or to the homes of friends and relatives. The district government reported that the floods left several thousand homes under water, caused a landslide that threatened 20 homes in Gornj Maoca, damaged a water supply network, and caused power outages in many regions. In Tuzla Canton, between 7,000 and 8,000 people were evacuated. Eight municipalities in Republika Srpska were under a state of emergency, and the Sava, Drina, Lukavac, Janja, and Tinja rivers in the northeast spilled over their banks. The Bosna River, running north from Sarajevo through the center of the country, also caused serious flooding.

On June 21, U.S. Ambassador Thomas J. Miller declared a disaster due to the effects of the heavy flooding. USAID/OFDA provided \$25,000 through the U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo to IFRC for the provision of emergency food and hygiene packs to flood victims.

USAID/OFDA Assistance\$25,000

HUNGARY

FLOODS

In early March 2001, heavy rainfall and melting snow caused record flooding in Eastern Europe, including along Hungary's Tisza, Tur, and Szamo rivers. On March 5, the situation in Hungary was aggravated when two levees along the Tisza River burst. More than 30,000 residents from 20 villages in the Bereg Region of eastern Hungary were evacuated as high water marks reached record levels.

On March 8, U.S. Chargé d'Affaires Thomas B. Robertson declared a disaster due to the effects of the heavy flooding. USAID/OFDA provided \$25,000 through USAID/Hungary for emergency assistance activities including the distribution of warm meals, blankets, and sanitation supplies to displaced flood victims. The USAID/OFDA assistance was provided to the Foundation for Development of Democratic Rights, a local NGO.

USAID/OFDA Assistance\$25,000

KAZAKHSTAN

COLD WAVE

Extremely cold weather in January and February 2001 lowered temperatures in Kazakhstan to minus 50 degrees Celsius. The sub-freezing conditions placed a severe strain on the country's power systems and on the more vulnerable segments of the affected population. Those most at risk from the cold weather were children and residents of public facilities such as orphanages and hospitals. Antiquated and poorly maintained heating systems were unable to provide sufficient warmth despite the availability of electricity and natural gas.

On February 13, U.S. Ambassador Richard H. Jones declared a disaster due to the extreme winter weather conditions. USAID/OFDA responded by providing \$25,000 through USAID/Kazakhstan to the IFRC. IFRC used the funds to rehabilitate household heating systems in eastern Kazakhstan (Ust Kamenogorsk and Leninogorsk), upgrade the roofs of houses in northern Kazakhstan (Petrovsk), and provide blankets and medicines as needed.

USAID/OFDA Assistance\$25,000

MACEDONIA

COMPLEX EMERGENCY

In February 2001, ethnic Albanian insurgents from the National Liberation Army (NLA) attacked Macedonian army and police positions in northwest Macedonia. The insurgents declared that they were fighting for greater civil rights and freedoms for the ethnic Albanian minority in Macedonia. By March, NLA attacks had spread to Tetovo, the second largest city in Macedonia, and the Government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) responded by shelling insurgent mountain positions above the city. In March, more than 40,000 Macedonians left their homes, either crossing the border into Kosovo or moving internally, primarily to the capital city of Skopje. As hostilities slowly subsided in April, many of those displaced gradually returned to their homes.

The relative calm was shattered in early May after eight Macedonian soldiers were killed in an ambush near Tetovo. Macedonian military forces shelled suspected insurgent positions in the villages of Vakcince, Lojane, and Slupcane, triggering new refugee and IDP movements. Later in May, Macedonian forces shelled villages surrounding Kumanovo. Although the Macedonian military called on village residents (mostly ethnic Albanians) to evacuate, an estimated 10,000 civilians in the Kumanovo area remained in their homes during the fighting, either because they refused to leave or were afraid to leave. During the peak of the fighting, more than 130,000 residents were displaced from their homes. A total of 60,000 people were internally displaced, and 70,000 became refugees in Kosovo.

As fighting spread in June to Aracinovo, a predominantly ethnic Albanian town on the outskirts of Skopje, the Macedonian government and the NLA agreed to a cease-fire. The cease-fire was broken by scattered fighting and restored again on July 5. Following heavy shelling around Tetovo on July 22 and 23, another cease-fire was established on July 26.

Each new round of fighting triggered refugee movements to Kosovo and displacement within Macedonia. UNHCR officials reported that 64,818 refugees from Macedonia, mostly ethnic Albanians, arrived in Kosovo during May and June. By the end of June, there were 33,715 registered IDPs in Macedonia, primarily Macedonian Slavs. The fighting, which was concentrated in ethnic Albanian villages, damaged or destroyed an

estimated 5,500-6,000 homes. However, 70% of the damaged homes sustained only minor damage.

Refugees in Kosovo began to return in significant numbers when ethnic Albanian and Macedonian Slav political parties signed a Western-mediated peace plan on August 13 in Ohrid, Macedonia. The plan backed constitutional and political reforms granting greater civil rights to the ethnic Albanian population and increased use of the Albanian language. Returns were also prompted when NATO troops began a 30-day disarmament of ethnic Albanian combatants as part of the peace agreement. NATO successfully collected nearly 4,000 weapons by the end of the program on September 27.

By late September, UNHCR officials estimated that 55,000 ethnic Albanian Macedonians had returned from Kosovo, while another 26,000 remained. The Macedonian Red Cross estimated that 41,000 stayed displaced in Macedonia, most of whom were living with host families.

USAID/OFDA personnel in Skopje monitored and assessed the humanitarian situation throughout the escalation in fighting. USAID/OFDA deployed a senior program officer to Skopje from May to August, followed by a senior regional advisor until September. Due to deteriorating security conditions in Macedonia, a USAID/OFDA program officer also worked from Kosovo.

On July 5, 2001, U.S. Ambassador Michael Einik declared a disaster due to the continued displacement of conflict-affected populations, but he did not request disaster assistance funds at that time. In mid-July, a USAID/OFDA shelter expert traveled to Macedonia to assess shelter sector needs and recommended an emergency transitional shelter program to repair and rehabilitate 1,000 houses.

On August 27, Ambassador Einik requested USAID/OFDA disaster assistance funds to support a return program for 60,000 displaced Macedonians. In response to the request, USAID/OFDA provided \$25,000 through the U.S. Embassy in Skopje to ARC to support displaced ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. ARC assisted more than 2,800 IDPs accommodated in collective centers by creating focus groups to provide and discuss critical information about security, their home areas, repair efforts, and other key issues affecting their return.

To further assist IDPs, USAID/OFDA also provided grants for emergency relief items, shelter repair, and agricultural rehabilitation. USAID/OFDA provided \$435,585 to AmRC to purchase and distribute hygiene parcels for 6,000 host families and 12,200 IDP families. USAID/OFDA provided Mercy Corps with \$551,891 to reconstruct shelter for 400 families, and \$733,533 to SNI/US to provide functional winter shelter for 600 returnee families. To facilitate ethnic reconciliation, SNI/US expended more than 60% of its program budget on procurement of goods and services from businesses owned by ethnic Macedonians, which in turn was used to repair the damaged homes of ethnic Albanians. In the agricultural sector, FAO provided wheat seed and basal fertilizer to more than 12,600 conflict-affected wheat farmers in 100 villages in the Tetovo, Kumanovo, Skopje, and Sveti Nikole regions with a USAID/OFDA grant of \$975,000.

USAID/FFP provided \$3 million in P.L. 480 Title II emergency food assistance to conflict-affected Macedonians; \$2 million for 3,100 MT of wheat flour, beans, and vegetable oil for Macedonian refugees in Kosovo; and approximately \$1 million for 1,200 MT of wheat flour, beans, and vegetable oil for WFP to distribute to IDPs.

USAID/OTI contributed \$918,000 in FY 2001 to rehabilitation programs in Macedonia. Of this total, USAID/OTI provided \$335,000 to the Community Self-Help Initiative to expand its activities in the conflict area and to support public education within the Ohrid Framework Agreement. The

remaining \$583,000 was used to launch a Confidence Building Initiative (CBI).

State/PRM provided more than \$7.8 million to U.N. agencies, IOs, and NGOs to meet the needs of Macedonian refugees and IDPs. State/PRM contributed \$4 million to UNHCR in two separate grants for its emergency response program and its return and reintegration programs. State/PRM provided \$100,000 to UN OCHA to facilitate inter-agency coordination, including crisis contingency plans in Macedonia and neighboring regions. A State/PRM contribution of \$1.5 million to ICRC went toward food and non-food assistance for conflict victims, in addition to water, sanitation, and emergency medical assistance. IOM, using a \$200,000 contribution from State/PRM, provided transportation assistance to new refugees in Kosovo and IDPs in Macedonia to help them move to transit facilities and host family locations.

State/PRM provided IRC with \$808,180 to support returning refugees and residents in the Tetovo and



Charles Setchell, a USAID/OFDA staff member (center with tie), participates in the initial distribution of USAID/OFDA-funded wheat seed to conflict-affected Macedonians during a visit to an FAO warehouse in Tetovo (photo by Ananta Hans, State/PRM).