USAID/OFDA WATER, SANITATION, AND HYGIENE SECTOR UPDATE – OCTOBER 2012

Sector Overview

Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programs often represent vital components of USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) responses to rapid-onset disasters and complex emergencies, as disaster-affected populations are more susceptible to illness and death from waterborne and communicable diseases. WASH interventions often include latrine construction, hand-washing promotion, sanitation education programs, and the provision of safe drinking water. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2012, USAID/OFDA provided more than $100 million for WASH programs in 29 countries. USAID/OFDA also links emergency activities with transition and development programs funded by other offices in USAID and incorporates institutional partners—such as local governments—in program planning and implementation to promote sustainability.

A woman uses a hand-washing station constructed after USAID/OFDA hygiene trainings. (Photo by Helen Ho/USAID)

Funding Rapid Response Activities in Ethiopia

The poor performance of seasonal rains left thousands of people vulnerable to critical water shortages in Ethiopia during the past year. In other parts of the country, floods and ongoing conflict displaced many households, forcing them to live in temporary settlement areas. In FY 2012, USAID/OFDA provided nearly $9 million for WASH programs to support urgent water interventions in Ethiopia.

The USAID/OFDA-supported Emergency Rapid Response program in Ethiopia, implemented through the International Rescue Committee (IRC), enabled the rapid launch of appropriate emergency WASH activities, allowing USAID/OFDA to quickly respond to humanitarian needs and prioritize life-saving interventions. In areas affected by drought or conflict, program activities included the rehabilitation of wells, water pumps, and rainwater harvesting systems, to improve access to safe drinking water for affected populations.

Within sites hosting families displaced by insecurity, IRC worked with communities to construct latrines and reduce open defecation in and around living areas. In addition, USAID/OFDA supported the installation of hand-washing facilities. IRC worked closely with the Government of Ethiopia Health Extension Program to conduct hygiene-promotion activities that focused on the importance of hand washing, safe water management, and latrine usage to further prevent the transmission of diarrheal diseases.

Responding Effectively to Sanitation in Emergencies

Approximately 2.6 billion people worldwide lack access to improved sanitation facilities, and an estimated 2 million people die each year as a result of diarrheal and other waterborne diseases. When responding to emergencies, providing adequate sanitation facilities can be challenging, particularly in areas with high water tables, hard rock sites, and urban areas. Unstable soils can also delay the construction of latrines.

Since 2009, an increasing number of emergencies in urban areas have amplified excreta disposal challenges. Following the 2009 floods in greater Manila, Philippines, and the 2010 earthquake in

Port-au-Prince, Haiti, the humanitarian community faced many obstacles while working in urban settings, including the construction of raised latrines and the development of systems to ensure regular safe sludge disposal and treatment in dense and crowded cities.

USAID/OFDA understands the urgent need to boost the dialogue and cooperation between a variety of actors to ensure effective response to sanitation in emergencies. To that end, USAID/OFDA is working with the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) to develop and design immediate response excreta disposal facilities that can serve disaster-affected residential areas, communal buildings, schools, and markets. The New Concepts and Modular Technologies for Safe Excreta Disposal in Emergency Settings project aims to create prototype facilities through a consultative process involving key participants in emergency sanitation responses. The project will sponsor design contests for suppliers and students; field test prototypes to gain the perspective of host communities, host government institutions, and other WASH actors; and work with the private sector to construct the disposal facilities. The new facilities seek to provide safe and reliable means of disposing waste and improving sanitation in emergency settings.

Inadequate sanitation perpetuates the cycle of disease that affects the world's poorest people, which is further exacerbated during times of emergency. USAID/OFDA aims to continue providing effective water and sanitation activities in emergencies around the world, as well as work with other humanitarian actors to find innovative solutions to water, sanitation, and hygiene challenges.

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