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International Humanitarian Assistance

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ADS 251 - International Humanitarian Assistance

251.1 OVERVIEW

Effective Date: 05/12/2022

This chapter identifies the policies, procedures, responsibilities, and definitions for effectively managing USAID's delivery of humanitarian assistance. The Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) supports the USAID Administrator in carrying out the Administrator's role as the President's Special Coordinator for International Disaster Assistance, in accordance with [Section 493 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended \(the FAA\)](#).

This chapter describes the range of humanitarian assistance provided by BHA and the roles and responsibilities of all BHA Offices. It provides guidelines for planning, achieving, and monitoring the progress and effectiveness of humanitarian response, as well as early recovery, risk reduction, and resilience activities funded by the International Disaster Assistance (IDA) account, the Food for Peace Act Title II account, and other USAID funding which may be designated for this purpose. This chapter also outlines the process for making a Declaration of Humanitarian Need to facilitate the provision of U.S. Government (USG) humanitarian assistance.

251.2 PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

Effective Date: 05/12/2022

a. The **USAID Administrator** is responsible to the President for the coordination of USG international disaster assistance.

b. The **Assistant to the Administrator, Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (AtA/BHA)** defines Agency-wide humanitarian assistance policy and strategy and ensures that approved policy and procedures are preserved in USAID's delivery of humanitarian assistance. The AtA/BHA is responsible for the implementation of activities authorized by [Sections 491 the FAA](#) and the [Title II of the Food for Peace Act](#).

c. The **Chief of the U.S. Mission, under the direction of the President and Secretary of State**, is responsible for the conduct of USG humanitarian assistance activities within their jurisdiction. Chiefs of Mission ensure that up-to-date Emergency Action Plans (EAPs) are operational in the Mission, and that Mission Disaster Relief Officers (MDROs) are appointed and perform designated duties (designation of an MDRO is a State Department requirement, per [12 FAH-1 H-242.2](#)).

d. The cognizant **USAID Mission Director**, in collaboration with USAID Regional and Pillar Bureaus and the Department of State, is responsible for the design and management of development programs. The Mission Director at post is the lead representative of USAID in-country, including to the international community, host government, and Chief of Mission. BHA Mission-based personnel have specific representation responsibilities to achieve the Agency's objectives, and these fall under

the overall leadership of the Mission Director. In countries where a USAID Mission or representative office is present, BHA's field-based advisors ensure that the USAID Mission Director is aware of emerging humanitarian policy issues, critical developments, and response and programming decisions, striving toward real-time information sharing.

e. The **Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, Office of Africa (BHA/OA); Office of Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean (BHA/ALAC); and Office of the Middle East, North Africa and Europe (BHA/MENAE)** design, provide, and assess humanitarian assistance for their respective regions, including assistance related to responding to, recovering from, and reducing the risk of human-made and natural disasters, while linking with other USAID investments that build resilience.

f. The **Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, Office of Field and Response Operations (BHA/FARO)** leads and manages operational assistance and the purchase and delivery of goods and services in response to events following declarations of humanitarian need and international humanitarian needs in key functional areas, including supply-chain management, procurement, logistics, oversight, and operational coordination with the U.S. military.

g. The **Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, Office of Technical and Program Quality (BHA/TPQ)** leads BHA's efforts to provide high-quality programmatic and technical leadership, oversight, and guidance. BHA/TPQ captures, applies, and strengthens capacity in technical best practices and contextually appropriate programmatic approaches focused on all dimensions of humanitarian response and transition, as well as analyses of risk and early warning.

h. The **Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, Office of Humanitarian Business and Management Operations (BHA/HBMO)** develops, maintains, and coordinates BHA's business functions and strategies in areas such as acquisition and assistance, workforce-planning, talent-management, internal training, the management of programmatic risk and audits, and information technology.

i. The **Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, Office of Global Policy, Partnerships, Programs, and Communications (BHA/G3PC)** shapes and influences USAID's role within the international humanitarian system; leads engagement on a range of policy, programmatic, and operational issues; and positions USAID to influence collective response to humanitarian needs across the globe.

j. Under the Response Management System (RMS), the **Response Director**, a role performed by senior staff within BHA, provides strategic oversight for a response.

k. When a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) is deployed, the **DART Leader** serves in an elevated role, fulfilling the field-level Lead Federal Coordinator role in international disasters and overseeing the entirety of the USG interagency humanitarian response for field operations in accordance with [Sections 491 and 493 of the FAA](#). During an activation, the DART Leader is delegated authority by the AtA/BHA to report directly to the Chief of Mission and the BHA/Washington Response Director.

The DART Leader coordinates and consults with the USAID Mission Director. The responsibilities of the DART Leader may include, but are not limited to:

- Organizing and directing field assessment and response activities across all needed sectors;
- Liaising with the U.S. military, non-governmental organizations, and national, bilateral and multilateral agencies involved with disaster response activities;
- Monitoring response activities;
- Identifying unmet needs;
- Coordinating the USG response to a disaster;
- Recommending to USAID/Washington, USAID Missions, and U.S. embassies appropriate interventions to address unmet needs;
- Supervising DART staff; and
- Seeking to ensure adherence to USAID policies aimed at preventing and addressing sexual misconduct—including exploitation, abuse, or harassment of any kind—among or perpetrated by USAID staff or implementing partners or involving beneficiaries of USAID assistance.

251.3 POLICY DIRECTIVES AND REQUIRED PROCEDURES

Effective Date: 05/12/2022

This chapter applies to all:

- Activities undertaken by BHA using IDA, Title II emergency funds, and other “borrowed” USAID funding that may be designated for this purpose; and
- Entities within USAID in the provision of humanitarian assistance, including emergency food assistance, furnished by USAID.

251.3.1 Response Management System (RMS)

Effective Date: 05/12/2022

The RMS is a systematic approach to guide BHA’s organization, structures, procedures, and management best practices for responding to large-scale international disasters. Following a Declaration of Humanitarian Need, and based on a determination by BHA, a DART may be deployed to a disaster-affected country and a Response Management Team (RMT) may be activated in Washington D.C., both outlined within the RMS.

Under the leadership of the Response Director, the RMS governs the work of the DART, RMT, and other elevated corporate responses. Where necessary, BHA may

request that qualified staff from other USAID Bureaus or Federal agencies participate in a response under the RMS structure.

251.3.2 Principles for Developing and Managing Humanitarian Assistance Activities

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Consistent with [FAA section 491\(d\)](#), BHA seeks to provide humanitarian assistance based on need according to the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and operational independence. Humanitarian concern must be the overriding principle in developing and managing humanitarian assistance, consistent with authorizing legislation. Agency staff must work to ensure that timely and appropriate assistance is efficiently delivered to the affected populations. BHA may rely on its “notwithstanding authority” where necessary to deliver disaster assistance on a timely basis (see section **251.3.3**).

BHA implements humanitarian assistance under two categories:

- Humanitarian response (characterized by urgent action), and
- Longer-term efforts aimed at mitigating chronic vulnerability (including early recovery, risk reduction, and resilience efforts, or "ER4").

A Declaration of Humanitarian Need is required for all humanitarian response programming, originating from BHA, including food and non-food emergency assistance, as well as food assistance for refugees.

BHA ER4 activities, utilized to prepare for, mitigate, or recover from a crisis, do not require a Declaration of Humanitarian Need. ER4 activities may stand alone, provided they do not address immediate humanitarian needs. However, ER4 activities intended to meet immediate humanitarian needs or directly integrated with BHA-funded humanitarian response activities must take place under a Declaration of Humanitarian Need. Implementation of ER4 programs may begin while efforts to address acute humanitarian needs are ongoing.

Risk reduction and resilience activities frequently stand alone, unintegrated with BHA-funded humanitarian response programming. Early recovery activities are typically integrated with humanitarian response, but in some cases may also stand alone. For example, a local community might respond to a disaster without BHA assistance, but BHA may still choose to provide funding for an early recovery program linked to the community’s own efforts.

Recognizing the need for collaboration, coherence, and complementarity across the respective mandates of humanitarian, development, and peace actors, BHA works closely with USAID Regional and Pillar Bureaus and USAID Missions when considering ER4 programming.

A. Humanitarian Response Programming

1. Declaration of Humanitarian Need: Chiefs of Mission (or, for countries without an official U.S. diplomatic presence, the cognizant Assistant Secretary of State) may issue a Declaration of Humanitarian Need with respect to a natural or human-induced event when all the following criteria exist in the host country:
 - a. There is evidence of significant unmet humanitarian need,
 - b. USG humanitarian assistance will save lives, reduce human suffering, and mitigate the impact of humanitarian emergencies on the most vulnerable,
 - c. The host country requests or will accept international assistance, and
 - d. Responding aligns with USG interests and humanitarian objectives.

The appropriate USG official issues the Declaration of Humanitarian Need at the time of the disaster event or issues a re-declaration every fiscal year if there is an ongoing crisis that meets the four criteria. A Declaration of Humanitarian Need phase beyond the end of the fiscal year requires prior approval of the AtA/BHA.

2. Chief of Mission's Authority: Following the issuance of a Declaration of Humanitarian Need, the Chief of Mission may request from BHA up to \$100,000 of IDA funds if a humanitarian need is identified. BHA will generally make funding available to the cognizant USAID Mission (either bilateral or regional) by providing a fund citation for obligation by the Mission in accordance with the Mission's own processes and procedures. Occasionally, BHA may make greater amounts available. The initial \$100,000 contribution and funding in excess of an initial \$100,000 contribution requires prior approval of the AtA/BHA.
3. Planning: USAID has developed numerous rapid response options capable of providing commodities and services to meet the exigencies of both natural and human-induced crises. Every post is required to maintain an up-to-date Emergency Action Plan, titled "Assistance to Host Country in a Major Disaster" (see [ADS 530, Emergency Planning Overseas](#) for more information on Emergency Action Plans). Emergency humanitarian response planning is distinct from Program Cycle planning. Stand-alone ER4 programs should strive to link with elements of the Program Cycle to inform potential synergies through strategic planning, activity design, and implementation. For more information on Mission-level strategic planning and other elements of the Program Cycle, see [ADS 201, Program Cycle Operational Policy](#).
4. Assessment: BHA responds to emergencies utilizing the IDA and Title II accounts based upon assessments by USAID, other USG field personnel,

recognized international organizations, and other credible sources.

5. **Termination of Assistance:** BHA remains dedicated to ending U.S. assistance whenever the humanitarian situation has changed to the point that continued assistance is either unnecessary or not possible.
6. **Guidance Cable:** BHA sends out an annual cable, typically during the first quarter of each new fiscal year, which provides guidance to all posts concerning support from BHA before, during, and after the occurrence of natural disasters and human-induced crises abroad. The guidance cable provides further information on BHA's capabilities for coordinating USG assistance in response to disasters and humanitarian crises, and additional detail on how BHA provides assistance, including sector-specific information.

B. Early Recovery

BHA early recovery programs and activities focus on enabling people to stand on their own after a crisis. Early recovery activities are not the same as humanitarian response activities. They do not address immediate, live-saving needs, and are implemented on a longer time horizon. Early recovery activities support communities impacted by crises to protect and restore basic systems and service delivery. Early recovery builds on humanitarian response efforts and establishes the initial foundations of long-term recovery and development.

C. Risk Reduction

BHA's risk reduction programs and activities reduce the risks posed by hazards (either single, sequential, or combined), emphasizing early warning, preparedness, mitigation, and prevention.

D. Resilience

BHA resilience programs and activities build the capacity of local and national actors. This entails strengthening government response systems and institutions as well as enabling local communities and households to develop their own capacities through community visioning, capacity-building, and access to resources, services, and coping mechanisms. BHA programs and activities seek to improve the absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities of governments and populations vulnerable to shocks and stresses.

E. BHA Collaboration and Partnerships

1. **USAID Collaboration:** BHA works closely with other USAID Bureaus, Missions, and Operating Units (OUs) to assure the most expeditious and efficient achievement of desired results. BHA collaborates with the geographic Bureaus; other Pillar Bureaus, including the Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning (PPL); and USAID central offices to facilitate the

maintenance of, or expeditious return to, sustainable development in crisis-affected or crisis-threatened countries; and promotion of overall policy coherence. For more information on USAID's overarching policy architecture, see [ADS 200, Development Policy](#).

2. Partnerships with USG Agencies: BHA maintains partnerships with other Federal agencies which have mandates and unique capabilities that can enhance USG humanitarian assistance operations. Numerous humanitarian response activities are enhanced by coordination with, and support of, other Federal agencies such as the Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration; the Department of Homeland Security; the Department of Defense; the Department of Health and Human Services; the U.S. Department of Agriculture; the Department of Commerce National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; and the Department of the Interior U.S. Geological Survey. In supporting the Administrator's lead role as the President's Special Coordinator for International Disaster Assistance, BHA helps ensure that Federal agencies that do not have their own authorities only respond to crises when they have been requested. BHA will often coordinate the role of other Federal agencies responding to crises overseas both in the field and in Washington, D.C., including through the convening of interagency coordination meetings, and through the DART and RMT when those entities have been activated under the RMS.

Additionally, when another Federal agency has unique capabilities that can facilitate BHA's response, BHA may request goods and services of other Federal agencies on a non-reimbursable basis where the other agency has its own funding and authorities, e.g., Department of Defense's (DOD's) authority under Title 10 with Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid funding, or on a reimbursable basis pursuant to BHA's authorities under [sections 491 and 632\(b\) of the FAA](#).

When requesting goods and services of other Federal agencies on a non-reimbursable basis, requests must be in writing and make clear that the request is for non-reimbursable support pursuant to the other agency's own funding and authorities.

When requesting support on a reimbursable basis, all requests must be made in writing exclusively through the execution of interagency reimbursable agreements pursuant to [ADS Chapter 306, Interagency Agreements](#).

- a. Other Partnerships: BHA's primary operating partners include: Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), which have presence in affected countries and experience with crises, emergency food assistance, and transition initiatives. BHA also operates through indigenous and local NGOs, when appropriate. BHA

may occasionally utilize other non-traditional partnerships, as appropriate.

- b. **Public International Organizations:** The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and the operational United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Organization for Migration (IOM), etc. are frequently partners in wide-scale or complex crises.
- c. **Other Donors:** BHA often takes the initiative in encouraging other humanitarian donor countries to accept a fair share of responsibility for supporting large scale response efforts, especially where their political and economic interests are high.

251.3.3 Notwithstanding Authority

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[Section 491 of the FAA](#) and [section 202\(a\) of the Food for Peace Act](#) include “notwithstanding authority,” which authorizes the provision of assistance notwithstanding any other provision of law. While this authority is self-executing, meaning that it may be relied upon without any formal action, as a matter of policy, BHA documents its exercise of this authority through notwithstanding memoranda. Notwithstanding authority is not used to overcome sanctions.

251.3.4 Information Management

Effective Date: 05/12/2022

BHA, in cooperation with other Missions, Bureaus and Independent Offices (B/IOs), and with partner and customer organizations, maintains operational, response readiness, procurement, and financial management databases to ensure accurate and timely management of USAID resources and the assessment of their impact in accordance with USAID information technology, data, and records management policies. For more information on USAID records and data management policies, see [ADS 502, The USAID Records Management Program](#); [ADS 509, Management and Oversight of Agency Information Technology Resources](#); [ADS 540, USAID Development Experience Information](#); and [ADS 579, USAID Development Data](#).

BHA maintains disaster information files that contain four types of relevant data.

1. **Historical Data:** Disaster occurrences, commodities, personnel, and services provided in disaster responses, disaster case reports, situation reports, fact sheets, and information bulletins.

2. Planning Data: Budget allocations and narratives, funding and commodity availability, lessons learned, stockpile balances, and vendor/contact lists.
3. Operational Data: Assessments, country strategies, response readiness dashboards, funding commitments, and balances and relief proposals.
4. Evaluation Data: Activity reports, evaluations, after-action reports, audits, and audit resolutions.

251.4 MANDATORY REFERENCES

251.4.1 External Mandatory References

Effective Date: 05/12/2022

- a. [The FAA, Chapter 9 - International Disaster Assistance](#)
- b. [The Food for Peace Act](#)

251.4.1 Internal Mandatory References

Effective Date: 05/12/2022

- a. [ADS 200, Development Policy](#)
- b. [ADS 201, Program Cycle Operational Policy](#)
- c. [ADS 306, Interagency Agreements](#)
- d. [ADS 502, The USAID Records Management Program](#)
- e. [ADS 509, Management and Oversight of Agency Information Technology Resources](#)
- f. [ADS 530, Emergency Planning Overseas](#)
- g. [ADS 540, USAID Development Experience Information](#)
- h. [ADS 579, USAID Development Data](#)

251.5 ADDITIONAL HELP

Effective Date: 05/12/2022

- a. **Field Operations Guide** – For a copy of this operational resource, please email: [**BHA.RMS@usaid.gov**](mailto:BHA.RMS@usaid.gov).
- b. [USAID: Where We Work](#)

251.6 DEFINITIONS

Effective Date: 05/12/2022

See the [ADS Glossary](#) for all ADS terms and definitions.

All-Hazards

The spectrum of all types of hazards including accidents, technological events, natural disasters, terrorist attacks, warfare, and chemical, biological including pandemic influenza, radiological, nuclear, or explosive incidents. (**Chapter 251** and [531](#))

Complex Emergency

A multifaceted humanitarian crisis in a country or region, is characterized by a total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict that requires a multi-sectoral, international response. Such emergencies have, in particular, a devastating effect on children and women, and call for a complex range of responses. (**Chapter 251**)

Declaration of Humanitarian Need

The Chief of Mission to an affected country (or, for countries without an official U.S. diplomatic presence, the cognizant Assistant Secretary of State), in close coordination with USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), makes a written Declaration of Humanitarian Need when an event meets the following four criteria: 1) there is evidence of significant unmet humanitarian need; 2) USG humanitarian assistance will save lives, reduce human suffering, and mitigate the impact of humanitarian emergencies on the most vulnerable; 3) the host country requests or will accept international assistance; and 4) responding aligns with USG interests and humanitarian objectives. (**Chapter 251**)

Disaster

An occurrence, human-induced or natural disaster, 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](#)**)

Early Recovery

Activities that help people and communities recover from an identifiable shock or stress and move away from dependence on humanitarian relief. Early recovery activities do not address immediate, humanitarian needs but, instead, build on humanitarian response and aligns with development principles to establish the initial foundations of long-term recovery. (**Chapter 251**)

Food for Peace Act, Title II

Primarily provides U.S. in-kind food to those suffering from hunger or starvation. (**Chapter 251**)

Humanitarian Assistance

Assistance intended to save lives, alleviate human suffering, and reduce the physical, social, and economic impact of rapid and slow-onset humanitarian emergencies. Humanitarian assistance coordinated by USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance

falls under two categories: humanitarian response (characterized by urgent action), and longer-term efforts aimed at mitigating chronic vulnerability (including early recovery, risk reduction, and resilience efforts, or "ER4"). (**Chapter 251**)

International Disaster Assistance (IDA) account

Funding source for BHA administered disaster responses, authorized in section 491 of the FAA. (**Chapter 251**)

Mission Disaster Relief Officer (MDRO)

The MDRO is appointed by the Chief of Mission and is the point of contact at post for disaster-related information, planning, and activities affecting the host country.

Designation of an MDRO is a State Department requirement, per 12 FAH-1 H-242.2. (**Chapter 251**)

Notwithstanding Clause

The authority in section 491 of the FAA and section 202(a) of the Food for Peace Act that allows USAID to undertake activities notwithstanding any other provision of law. (**Chapter 251**)

Resilience

The ability of people, households, communities, countries, and systems to mitigate, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses in a manner that reduces chronic vulnerability and facilitates inclusive growth. (**Chapter 251**)

Response Management System

A systematic approach to guide BHA's organization, structures, procedures, and management best practices for responding to large-scale international disasters. The RMS governs the work of the DART and RMT, and all other Elevated Bureau-Level Responses (EBRs). The National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Incident Command System (ICS) form the foundation and influence the continuous improvement of the RMS. (**Chapter 251**)

Risk Reduction

Disaster risk is expressed as the potential loss of life, injury, or destruction/damage to assets that could occur to a system, society, or community in a specific period of time. It can be expressed as a function of hazard, exposure, vulnerability, and capacity. Risk reduction is the prevention of new risk, reduction of existing risk, and management of residual risk, all of which contribute to strengthening resilience and to the achievement of sustainable development. (**Chapter 251**)