



Building a sustainable future: Protecting communities



Protecting communities by better preparing them for the disasters they will face, and responding quickly and effectively when they do occur, is the cornerstone of effective humanitarian action.

Disasters can undermine, and even reverse, hard-won development progress.

With 95 per cent of deaths from natural disasters occurring in developing countries, humanitarian emergencies have a disproportionate effect on poor and vulnerable communities. In 2011, disasters claimed over 29,700 lives, impacted 206 million people and inflicted a record \$366 billion in economic damages.

Australian investment in disaster risk reduction can help partner countries save lives, reduce the costs of responding to disasters, protect their economies, and safeguard critical infrastructure. In 2010 alone, humanitarian action accounted for 11 per cent of Australia's official development assistance and covered a broad range of areas including food assistance, disaster risk reduction, mine action and emergency response in more than 60 countries.



Photo: Dian Lestariningsih

Preparing for disasters in Indonesia

Australian aid has supported a pilot program in eastern Indonesia, in which community groups identified where people live and the types of buildings in the region. Using a free wiki world map called OpenStreetMap, which was available for download and input by all in the community, the data collected helped disaster managers identify areas most at risk and prepare for potential disasters.

“It’s amazing to be able to identify health centres with just one click and instantly work out how far away it is from people who need it most,” said Dedy, a community participant who identified how to protect his village from flash floods.

“Thanks to our mapping work, I now know where the water piping and drainage should be and will be working with the village leaders to improve the system,” he said.



Photo: Scott Kelleher, AusAID

The Australian Civilian Corps

Australia established the Australian Civilian Corps (ACC) initiative in 2009 to enable the deployment of civilian specialists to countries experiencing or emerging from natural disaster or conflict. The ACC supports stabilisation, recovery and development planning. It assists crisis-affected countries to restore essential services and strengthen government institutions. It is in essence a civilian “reserve” that can be used in time of crisis to help restore or rebuild basic services, capability or capacity.

The ACC initiative acts as a much needed bridge between humanitarian and emergency response and long term development programs. It complements Australia’s existing and important work in the areas of emergency response, humanitarian assistance and long term development. The ACC register now includes more than 270 trained civilian specialists. These specialists are chosen for their technical expertise and ability to work in challenging overseas environments. ACC specialists have so far been deployed to Papua New Guinea, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Afghanistan and Haiti. The ACC initiative is structured along similar lines to deployable civilian capabilities in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada.

Responding to the humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa

Australia responded rapidly to the crisis in the Horn of Africa, providing urgently needed food rations, health support and shelter to help the most vulnerable people affected by the crisis.

More than 10 million people continue to need food and humanitarian aid in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. Seasonal rains in 2012 are forecast to be 80 per cent below average, which will lead to significantly reduced crop production and increased humanitarian needs.

Australia is currently the world's fourth largest country donor to the Horn of Africa.



Photo: Heather Pilans, AusAID

Darwin nurse Natasha Roberts was deployed with the Australian Medical Task Force providing vital health care in Kot Addu, Pakistan, in the wake of the devastating 2010 floods.