

Discussion FORUM

March 2008

Number 33

Community Renewal Techniques in Preparation and Reconstruction

Washington-area professionals gathered on March 20th for the thirty-third IRG Discussion Forum, "Community Renewal: Techniques in Preparation and Reconstruction," to hear Director of the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) Ky Luu discuss USAID/OFDA's disaster risk reduction activities and Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) representatives Leslie McCuaig and Betty Weiss explain the importance of community engagement, leadership and capacity building as tools for community preparedness and reconstruction. The discussion was facilitated by Timothy R. Knight, IRG Corporate Vice President Managing Director for Relief and Reconstruction.

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina and the Asian tsunami, reconstruction practitioners have learned that, as IRG Managing Director Timothy Knight explained in his introduction, "In the aftermath of a disaster, not only is it important to rebuild the physical infrastructure, it is critical to rebuild the affected community's social and economic fabric."

"Because all disasters are local in nature," Mr. Knight explained, "proactive community involvement in relief efforts is necessary at the local and state as well as federal level, and that involvement must consider the complex interplay of population growth, settlement patterns, environmental management, economics and technology. Despite the undeniable losses they inflict, disasters can also be seen as opportunities to improve the legal and government framework in ways that can mitigate the effects of future disasters."

Mr. Knight cited improved community organization; an improved physical infrastructure, achieved with improved building techniques; improved systems to reduce risk; and improved reactions to future disasters as possible results of an integrated approach to



A village in Aceh, Indonesia shows signs of recovery following the tsunami

response and preparedness activities. "These desired results must, however, be weighed against local traditions and costs," Mr. Knight warned. "After the risks and vulnerabilities have been identified and local capacity and institutional knowledge brought to bear, best practices are still subject to local practicalities."

"After the risks and vulnerabilities have been identified and local capacity and institutional knowledge brought to bear, best practices are still subject to local practicalities," Mr. Knight said.

"Climate change, population growth and increasing urban settlement mean that more people are now at risk in more vulnerable

areas of the world. The challenges posed by the increasing number of disasters we face are the same in the developing and the developed world; the lessons learned apply everywhere," Mr. Knight concluded.

Building Community Capacity

The Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance is responsible for coordinating the U.S. Government's response to international disasters



USAID Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance: http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/disaster_assistance

Institute for Sustainable Communities: <http://www.iscvt.org>

Official website, Moss Point, Mississippi: <http://www.cityofmosspoint.org>

City profile of Moss Point, Mississippi: <http://www.city-data.com/city/Moss-Point-Mississippi.html>

and complex emergencies. According to OFDA Director Ky Luu, "In 2007, OFDA responded to 76 declared disasters affecting more than 93 million people in 56 countries. While disaster assistance is the most visible part of OFDA's mandate, we also work in the areas of preparedness and risk reduction." Mr. Luu added that, while historically the agency

has responded to unanticipated disasters, more recently OFDA has also focused on predictable emergencies, such as droughts and civil strife.

"OFDA's mandate is to save lives, alleviate suffering and reduce the social and economic impact of disasters," Mr. Luu said. "At the request of affected governments, OFDA provides assistance through local community offices and non-governmental agencies. Our Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) programs help develop early warning systems that enable the evacuation of populations before an impending hazard, such as a flood, cyclone or volcanic eruption; improve local capacity for search and rescue operations and strengthen emergency preparedness and relief efforts; and reduce vulnerability to potential hazards through, for example, the provision of seismic resistant shelters."



Ky Luu describes OFDA's activities

Building Sustainable Communities

The Institute for Sustainable Communities works in 18 countries around the world to give people the tools, skills and resources they need to make their communities

better places to live, Senior Vice President of Programs Leslie McCuaig explained. "We believe in the ability of communities to help themselves grow stronger, healthier, more stable, more prosperous and more peaceful. In our work, ISC combines the commitment of a nonprofit with a business-minded approach to enable citizens to become strong advocates and effective leaders."

Ms. McCuaig described a sustainable community as one "that is prepared for both the risks and the opportunities posed by potential hazards; adaptable in working

"Our DRR efforts are designed to be specific to the region, depending on the hazards the region faces and the local community resources and capacities available," Mr. Luu explained. "In all cases, however, OFDA strives to:

- Reduce the community's vulnerability to natural disasters
- Avert the need for costly national and international disaster responses
- Increase resilience to disasters to ensure sustainable development
- Empower local governments to take control of their own fate."

"Disaster Risk Reduction efforts are specific to the region, depending on the hazards the region faces and the community resources and capacities available," Mr. Luu explained.



Timothy R. Knight discusses the common disaster management challenges faced by the developing and developed world.

to avert potential risks and in responding positively to changing environments; and resilient in its ability to ensure that its response to a disaster leads to coordinated recovery

Leslie McCuaig described sustainable communities as “prepared, adaptable and resilient.”

and renewal. ISC works to develop sustainable communities in the wake of disasters by engaging and empowering citizens; strengthening local leadership and institutions; facilitating community planning; providing technical and strategic assistance; and serving as a catalyst and convener.”

The Moss Point Renewal Program

ISC Director of Community Initiatives Betty Weiss provided a portrait of ISC in action in its work with the community of Moss Point, Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina. This small city of 17,000 people had just elected new leadership the month before the hurricane hit, inflicting extensive

damage to the historic downtown area and damaging 80 percent of its homes.

According to Ms. Weiss, “ISC’s ongoing support to Moss Point includes leadership development for elected officials, city managers and community leaders; technical assistance in areas such as civic engagement, economic development and neighborhood development; capacity building for nonprofits in the form of strategic planning, program development, fund-raising and organizational and board development; and city-to-city linkages with strategic resource partners.”

“In this regard,” Ms. Weiss explained, “ISC has formed a lasting relationship with Moss Point, that has resulted in specialized assistance to the community’s recovery efforts. ISC

“All measures of progress are subjective, however, and best evaluated by the community itself,” Ms. Weiss cautioned.

also brought thirty Moss Point government and community leaders to Charlottesville, Virginia, to learn about best practices in neighborhood revitalization, effective city management and public-private partnerships on a study tour that has

led to a partnership between the two cities.” “These relationships and the long-term commitment of ISC have helped the citizens of Moss Point realize more sustainable results in their



Leslie McCuaig and Betty Weiss present a case study from Moss Point, Mississippi

Timothy R. Knight, IRG Corporate Vice President and Managing Director, Relief and Reconstruction, has over 25 years of experience in crisis and conflict/post-conflict management and disaster relief. He has organized responses to complex situations in more than 50 countries. Mr. Knight formerly served as assistant director of USAID’s Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance, overseeing emergency assistance and reconstruction programs in Africa, Europe and the Middle East. From 1993 to 1997, he managed the US government’s \$240 million humanitarian assistance program in former Yugoslavia. He also served as chief of staff for the International Commission on Missing Persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ky Luu is the Director of the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance, Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance. Prior to joining OFDA, he played a key role in strategic planning, policy and program development and emergency global response as Vice President for International Medical Corps. His extensive experience with NGOs includes serving as Director of Government Relations for the International Research & Exchanges Board in Washington, D.C., as Resettlement Officer for the U.S. Refugees Resettlement Office in Croatia and as Government Relations Officer for the International Rescue Committee in Washington, D.C.

Leslie McCuaig has been with ISC since August 2002, when she started up the Ukraine Citizens Action Network, serving as Chief of Party of this ground-breaking civil society program until 2005, when she returned to the U.S. to become ISC’s Senior Vice President of Programs. A specialist in local, grassroots and community-based programming, Ms. McCuaig’s experience includes private sector development, small- and medium-enterprise support, demand-side Rule of Law development and civil society programming.

Betty Weiss, Director of Community Initiatives, joined ISC in October 2002 and has worked in its Montpelier and Washington, D.C. offices supporting the development and implementation of its international and domestic programs. She currently directs ISC’s Gulf Coast Renewal Project for Moss Point, Mississippi, helping elected officials, local nonprofits and community leaders gain the tools and skills needed to build more sustainable communities in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

recovery efforts," she added. "The ultimate test of the community's recovery will be its achievement of greater preparedness, resiliency and adaptability. Such measures of progress are subjective, however, and best evaluated by the community itself, and not the donors or ISC."

Forum Feedback

Forum participants agreed that, while Department of Defense involvement in disaster recovery efforts can be a great asset in terms of the resources the military can quickly bring to the scene, it is critical that such

IRG Speaks Out

President and CEO **Asif M. Shaikh** introduced keynote speaker Zalmay Khalilzad, US Ambassador to the UN, at the SID-Washington Annual Conference on March 5th.

In his Capacity as Chair of the Institutional Members group of SID-Washington, Mr. Shaikh hosted Maureen Shauket, Director of USAID's Office of Acquisition and Assistance, at a SID-Washington Institutional Members Event on April 7th.

Also at the SID-Washington Conference, **Frederick Guymont**, Civil Engineer, spoke at a panel on Global Trends in Infrastructure. He touched on USAID infrastructure programs and the resources devoted to them.

Senior Manager **Charles Benjamin's** paper "Pluralism and Local Government in Mali: Challenges of Decentralized Natural Resource Management" has been accepted for publication in *World Development*.

Matthew S. Mendis, Corporate Vice President and Managing Director, Energy and Environmental Management, was interviewed by Sri Lankan television on the subject of reducing and trading carbon credits and the workings of the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) within the Kyoto Protocol.

ABOUT THE IRG DISCUSSION FORUM

The IRG Discussion Forum is an event that addresses issues affecting international development. Each session is informal, with guest speakers and attendees participating in a personal capacity. For comments, questions, or information on the Discussion Forum, contact discussionforum@irgltd.com or call IRG at 202.289.0100

International Resources Group (IRG) is an international professional services firm that helps governments, the private sector, communities, and households manage critical resources to build a cleaner, safer, and more prosperous world. Since 1978, IRG has completed over 750 contracts in more than 135 countries, delivering high-quality, cost effective services that promote positive economic growth, institutional and social change, and intelligent use of resources—human, physical, environmental and financial. IRG's international development staff include world-renowned specialists who have pioneered many of the analytical techniques employed in their fields. IRG's ability to provide management, economic, and technical advice is further enhanced by the diversity, cross-cultural experience, foreign language skills, and management capabilities of staff based in the Washington, DC headquarters, corporate offices in India and the Philippines, and project-dedicated offices around the world.

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