



Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, San José, Costa Rica

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION



Photo by Fernando Padilla, USAID/OFDA

The first all-woman firefighter brigade in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, participates in a USAID/OFDA-supported firefighter mobilization exercise held in April.

Incorporating Gender into Disaster Work

USAID/OFDA strives to integrate gender equality and female empowerment into disaster response and disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities worldwide.

As part of these efforts, USAID/OFDA supported the Fourth International Gender and Disasters Conference, held from May 16 to 18 in Bogotá, Colombia. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) organized the event in collaboration with the Government of Colombia.

More than 130 representatives from disaster management agencies, women's commissions, universities, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) throughout Latin America and the Caribbean gathered to discuss strategies for strengthening the incorporation of gender and protection issues into DRR and disaster response activities.

The conference convened participants from three sub-regional workshops on gender and disasters, also supported by USAID/OFDA, held in Guatemala in September

2010 and in Colombia and Trinidad and Tobago in October 2010.

Presenters at the conference shared nine experiences related to implementing gender-oriented DRR and response programs. To highlight a few: the development of a joint response mechanism between police, national disaster agencies, and women's organizations in Honduras; the implementation of a novel university curriculum on gender and disasters in Jamaica; and the development of a mental and sexual health initiative for disaster-affected populations in Colombia. Presenters discussed positive outcomes as well as challenges encountered in program implementation.

Integration of gender concerns varies considerably in the region, and the conference afforded participants with less experience the opportunity to learn from the various successes.

Another goal of the Bogotá conference was to develop a Regional Action Plan for incorporating gender

Continued on page 2

DISASTER RESPONSE

USAID/OFDA Assists Paraguay after Floods

Heavy rains and extensive flooding since late 2011 resulted in at least seven deaths and affected approximately 14,000 families in the Chaco Region of Paraguay.

In response, USAID/OFDA provided \$50,000 to the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) in May to provide relief supplies to affected families.

On April 13, the Government of Paraguay (GoP) declared a state of emergency in Presidente Hayes, Boquerón, and Upper Paraguay departments and provided food and other disaster assistance to affected populations. The Chaco Region is a vast, sparsely populated, semi-arid region devoted largely to cattle raising. The region is normally dry; the last time significant flooding occurred was in 1997.

As floodwaters receded, the GoP requested international assistance to help affected families return to their communities. The majority of affected populations are indigenous people who work as hired labor in the cattle industry.

To assist affected populations, USAID/OFDA provided funds to ADRA for the local purchase and distribution of relief supplies, including mattresses, blankets, personal hygiene items, and clean-up supplies, to benefit approximately 650 families in Presidente Hayes Department.

In late May, USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor Phil Gelman traveled to Presidente Hayes to help coordinate the USAID/OFDA-funded emergency assistance with ADRA.

USAID/OFDA may provide additional humanitarian assistance to Paraguay, pending further needs analysis.



Photo by Phil Gelman, USAID/OFDA

ADRA volunteers carry USAID/OFDA-funded mattresses to distribute to affected families.



Photo by Auriana Koutnik, USAID/OFDA

Trainees in Chinchá, Peru, gather in front of a house they built as part of a USAID/OFDA-supported construction course targeting women who lost their homes during the 2007 earthquake in Peru.

Incorporating Gender into DRR Activities

Continued from page 1

into disaster work. The draft plan includes methods to ensure effective cooperation between gender, disaster management, and climate change mechanisms; capacity-building strategies to strengthen gender-based policies at government institutions; and a commitment to promote and foster participation of women in decision-making processes. Organizers planned to publish the finalized plan in June, for adoption by the region's disaster management agencies.

The conference and proposed Regional Action Plan are among a number of global initiatives to address gender gaps in disaster and development, including the U.S. Government's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, released in December 2011, and USAID's new Policy on Gender Equality and Female Empowerment, released in March 2012. Both initiatives aim to increase equality between males and females, empower women and girls to participate fully in development, and increase women's and girls' access to resources and economic, social, political and cultural opportunities.

The Fourth International Conference on Gender and Disasters strengthened a network of organizations and experts committed to the issue of gender in disasters, that will carry forward the momentum created by the conference.

This process includes the Gender and Disasters web site, conferenciageneroydesastres.org, which contains conference video footage, presentations, and reports, as well as information regarding the three sub-regional workshops leading up to it. The site also serves as a forum for those who want to develop new ideas and continue the discussions started at the conference.

USAID/OFDA encourages everyone to join the conversation.



Photo by Katherine Reid, USAID/OFDA

USAID/OFDA Social Science Advisor Marion Pratt (left) addresses participants at the recent gender and disaster conference.

COMING UP

Third USAID/OFDA Haiti Study Tour

USAID/OFDA is organizing a third Haiti Study Tour to share lessons learned in urban disaster recovery and risk reduction during the 2010 earthquake response.

The study tour will take place in Port-au-Prince from July 17 to 19 and will focus on urban shelter and settlements issues in disaster response.

"The idea is for participants to be catalysts within their organizations, able to promote improved urban preparedness and risk reduction in their own countries," said USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor Phil Gelman, who is helping to organize the upcoming study tour.

Previous study tours took place in October 2011 and March 2012.

The January 12, 2010, magnitude 7.0 earthquake near Port-au-Prince was one of the largest urban disasters in the Western Hemisphere and one of the most severe to ever strike a national capital.

Civil-Military Relations Exchange in Belize

USAID/OFDA will participate in the Civil-Military Relations Professional Development Exchange Conference, organized by the U.S. Army South in Belmopan, Belize, from July 17 to 19.

The conference provides a forum for military and civilian leaders to share information, best practices, and lessons learned in the area of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief at the decision-maker level. The event will facilitate the development of key capabilities, systems, and relationships among participating organizations and individuals.

Participants will include military leaders, United Nations representatives, Belizean and U.S. civilian government officials, and NGO staff.

Regional DRR and Higher Education Forum

USAID/OFDA is supporting a regional forum for representatives from universities, disaster management agencies, and governments to discuss the role of higher education in DRR.

The "*Latin American Forum on Disaster Risk Reduction in Higher Education*" is scheduled to take place in Panama City, Panama, from August 28 to 30. The Latin American and Caribbean University Network for Emergency and Disaster Risk Reduction (REDULAC), Universidad Especializada de Las Américas (UELAS), and the Superior Central American University Council (CSUCA) are organizing the event, with support from USAID/OFDA and the U.N. International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

Forum organizers expect approximately 200 people to participate in the event, which will feature numerous panels and roundtable discussions.

Panels will cover themes such as incorporating DRR in student programs, DRR research by universities, university outreach targeting DRR, social media and DRR, university networks and their contributions to DRR in the region, DRR communities of knowledge and practice, and more.

For additional information, or to register as a participant in the forum, please see the REDULAC web site: www.redulac.net.

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