



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

DISASTER RESPONSE

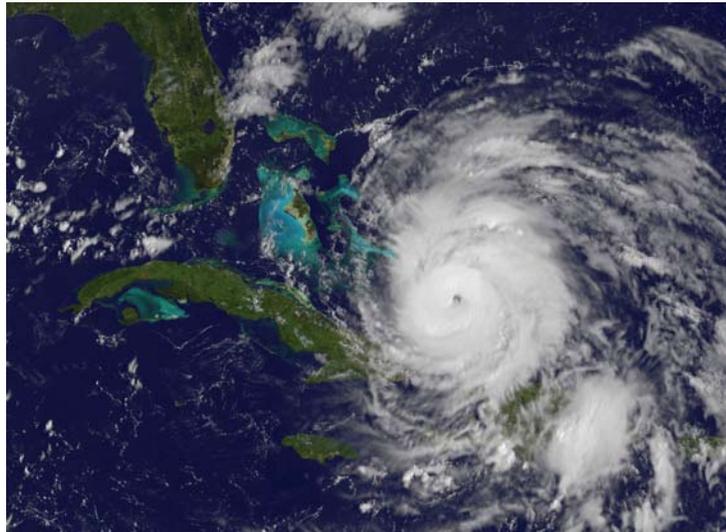


Photo courtesy of NASA/NOAA GOES Project

This satellite image shows the eye of Hurricane Irene, the first hurricane of the 2011 Atlantic hurricane season, as it became a major hurricane over the southeastern Bahamas on August 24.

Responding to Hurricane Irene

On August 24 and 25, Hurricane Irene passed over the Bahamas as a Category Three hurricane on the Saffir-Simpson Wind Scale.

No fatalities were reported in connection with the storm, however, hurricane-force winds and heavy rains caused significant infrastructure damage and power outages on a number of islands. The most severely affected islands, according to the Government of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas (GCOB) National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), were Cat Island, Eleuthera, Acklins, Crooked Island and Long Cay, Rum Cay, Long

Island, Mayaguana, and Inagua. Electricity could not be immediately restored on various islands, affecting the operation of water treatment systems and health clinics.

NEMA assessments conducted in the days following the hurricane indicated that approximately 15,000 hurricane-affected individuals required fresh water and other forms of humanitarian assistance.

In response to the effects of Hurricane Irene, USAID/OFDA provided nearly \$102,000 in emergency assistance to the Bahamas, including

Continued on page 2

USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor John Kimbrough (left) and Luke Bethel, from the Bahamas NEMA, observe the arrival of USAID/OFDA relief supplies in Nassau during the response to Hurricane Irene.



Photo courtesy of the U.S. Embassy in Nassau

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

USAID/OFDA to Provide USAR Technical Assistance to the DR

On September 8, the U.S. Embassy in Santo Domingo, through USAID and the Military Assistance Advisory Group, signed an agreement with the Government of the Dominican Republic (GODR) to provide training and technical assistance to strengthen national urban search and rescue (USAR) capabilities.

The agreement notes the importance of strengthening USAR capabilities in the Dominican Republic due to the country's high seismic vulnerability (including four very active fault lines), constant urban growth, and lessons learned from the 2010 earthquake in neighboring Haiti.

Under the agreement, USAID/OFDA, through the Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP), will provide USAR training and capacity building to the Santo Domingo Firefighters Corps, in collaboration with the GODR National Emergency Commission (CNE)

Continued on page 2



Photo by Ricardo Berganza, USAID/OFDA

Representatives from the governments of the U.S. and Dominican Republic sign the agreement.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

USAID/OFDA Helps Countries Create National Education Plans

Since the early 1990s, USAID/OFDA has provided technical assistance to education leaders in various countries in Latin America to establish national plans to promote disaster risk management in education.

This year, Honduras and Paraguay joined the growing list of countries that have approved national disaster risk management education plans. The list also includes Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama.

Honduras officially presented its National
Continued on page 2

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

National DRR Education Plans Passed

Continued from page 1

Plan for Risk Management in the Education Sector on August 24.

USAID/OFDA disaster risk management specialists (DRMSes) Manuel Ramírez, who coordinates the education component of the RDAP, and Fernando Calderón, who covers Honduras, provided technical assistance to the Government of Honduras to draft its national plan. Representatives from UNICEF and various non-governmental organizations also contributed to the development of the plan.

Approximately one month earlier, Paraguay became the first country in South America to approve a national plan for disaster risk management in the education sector. The Government of Paraguay's Ministry of Education and Culture approved the National Education Plan for Risk Management on July 18 and is scheduled to officially present it on October 10.

DRMS Ramírez, together with DRMS Carlos Córdova, who covers Paraguay, helped education officials in Paraguay develop their national plan.

In general, Ramírez explained, each country's national plan incorporates a multi-disciplinary and inter-institutional approach to promoting disaster risk management in the education sector. First response agencies and other stakeholders in each country, including firefighters and police officers, national Red Cross chapters, hazard experts, and others, participated in the drafting of the plans, he added.

The plans define areas and actions to promote disaster risk management in each country's education sector, including curriculum development, student training, risk identification, school safety programs, and the commitment of educational institutions to community disaster prevention and response activities.

In related news, the book, "*Educación y Gestión del Riesgo, una Experiencia para Compartir*," which describes USAID/OFDA's efforts since the 1980s to promote disaster risk management in schools throughout the region, is now available in hard copy.

Helping the Bahamas after Hurricane Irene

Continued from page 1

\$50,000 for the local procurement of 16 generators, donated to NEMA to provide emergency electrical power to affected islands, and other supplies provided to affected families through the Bahamas Red Cross.

Additionally, on September 1, USAID/OFDA transported relief supplies – including 50 rolls of plastic sheeting for temporary roofs and shelters, 480 family hygiene kits, 1,800 ten-liter water containers, and 5 chainsaws – from its warehouse in Miami, Florida, to Nassau for distribution to storm-affected communities. These supplies were valued at approximately \$36,000, including transportation.

On August 22, in preparation for Hurricane Irene, USAID/OFDA activated a 16-person assessment and response team composed of a regional advisor, disaster risk management specialists, local surge capacity consultants, a communications officer, and a military liaison officer. The team, based in Nassau, worked closely with NEMA officials to monitor weather conditions and emergency preparedness efforts before the storm and to perform damage assessments and evaluations of humanitarian needs after the storm.

On August 26, the day after the hurricane passed through the Bahamas, through the RDAP, USAID/OFDA provided approximately \$16,000 to fund a reconnaissance flight over the islands so that members of the GCOB, NEMA, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), and USAID/OFDA could perform a rapid assessment of the impacts of Hurricane Irene.

Although the storm caused significant damage to infrastructure, the damage could have been greater if communities had not been as well prepared as they were, commented Regional Advisor John Kimbrough, who led the USAID/OFDA team in the Bahamas.

"According to NEMA and the Bahamas Red Cross, the Community Disaster Response Teams (CDRTs) on the southern and eastern islands did an excellent job of helping people get ready for the storm and into safe shelters, as well as helping with assessments after the storm," said Kimbrough, adding that the Bahamas Red Cross trained the CDRTs as part of the USAID/OFDA-funded Readiness to Respond Program.

"We had a Category Three hurricane barreling down on the Bahamas, and there was no loss of life. That really says something about community preparedness in the southern and eastern islands," he said.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Helping to Strengthen USAR Capabilities

Continued from page 1

and National Emergency Operations Center (EOC).

The RDAP has various training courses in its portfolio that are provided to firefighters and other first responders working within the national emergency management systems of countries that are working with USAID/OFDA to implement a national USAR system. In addition to the Dominican Republic, USAID/OFDA is working with the governments of Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Mexico, Panama, Peru, and several other countries in the Eastern Caribbean to strengthen national USAR capabilities.

The recently signed agreement with the GODR states that the U.S. Government, through USAID and MAAG, will provide USAR training, technical assistance, and equipment in accordance with the guidelines of the International Urban Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG), part of the United Nations system. RDAP training courses include light and medium-level collapsed structures rescue, pre-hospital medical care, incident command system, and EOC management.

The agreement also states the CNE will lead the GODR in developing and funding a national search and rescue system. The EOC, meanwhile, will work to identify and prepare grounds for the construction of an USAR training facility and practice area for collapsed structures rescue exercises.

COMING UP

Study Tour to Review Urban DRR in Haiti

USAID/OFDA is organizing a study tour of Port-au-Prince to review lessons learned from the response to the Haiti earthquake, which ranks among the largest urban disasters in history. The tour, scheduled from October 4 to 6, will provide participants from various Latin American countries an opportunity to learn how to better prepare for urban disasters based on the disaster risk reduction (DRR) lessons learned from the Haiti experience.

Conference on DRR in the Education Sector

USAID/OFDA is supporting the International Conference on DRR in the Education Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean, scheduled to take place in Panama from October 12 to 14. Various U.N. agencies, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and several nongovernmental organizations are also supporting the event, which will bring together education officials from the region.

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