



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

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS



Photo by Ana M.Cea, USAID/OFDA

Residents of Santa María Ostuma municipality in El Salvador gather around USAID/OFDA-donated emergency relief supplies distributed to affected communities after Hurricane Ida caused floods and mudslides in late 2009.

USAID/OFDA Ready for Hurricane Season

USAID/OFDA is preparing for an above-average hurricane season this year.

The Colorado State University forecast team predicts 15 named storms will form in the Atlantic basin during the 2010 season (from June 1 to November 30), with 8 expected to become hurricanes and 4 developing into major hurricanes (Category 3 or higher on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale). This forecast is significantly higher than the 1950-2000 season average, which includes 10 named storms, 6 hurricanes, and 2 major hurricanes.

With an experienced team of disaster management professionals strategically located throughout Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), emergency relief supplies and communications gear prepared for deployment, and agreements in place with partners and service providers, USAID/OFDA is ready to respond to the effects of hurricanes and other severe storms as needed.

A senior regional advisor and five regional advisors – experienced,

multilingual disaster management professionals with broad knowledge of the region's potential hazards, geography, and cultural and socio-economic characteristics – are based at the USAID/OFDA/LAC regional office in San José, Costa Rica.

These advisors, along with 20 disaster risk management specialists and 230 on-call surge capacity consultants with extensive disaster management experience, are available for immediate deployment in case of a disaster. The specialists and surge capacity consultants are the backbone of USAID/OFDA's Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP), which also provides training and technical assistance in disaster risk reduction and preparedness to national disaster organizations and first responders in the region.

The USAID/OFDA/LAC regional office has also assigned staff to Bridgetown, Barbados, on a rotating schedule (from July to November) to provide continuous USAID/OFDA preparedness and response coverage

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DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

DRR Project in Guatemala Strengthens Communities

USAID/OFDA disaster risk management specialists recently visited several municipalities in Guatemala where USAID/OFDA is supporting a project to strengthen local capacities for disaster risk management and response.

Project leaders are working with community members and government officials in five municipalities, San Miguel Chicaj and Rabinal in Baja Verapaz Department, Santa Catarina Ixtahuacán and Nahualá in Sololá Department, and Tecpán in Chimaltenango Department, to improve knowledge of local hazards and vulnerabilities as well as increase capacities to respond to disasters.

A consortium of non-governmental organizations, led by SHARE Guatemala with the collaboration of Catholic Relief Services and CARE, is implementing the \$1.2 million project. USAID/OFDA funded the project and is providing technical assistance as well.

The consortium has signed an agreement with the Executive Secretary of Guatemala's National Coordinator for Disaster Reduction (CONRED) to help strengthen the national disaster management system at local levels and increase the resiliency of participating communities.

In early May, USAID/OFDA disaster specialists Ricardo Berganza and Eduardo Gutiérrez accompanied members of the consortium on field visits to the municipalities of San Miguel Chicaj, Nahualá, and Tecpán to observe project implementation in areas including school safety, damage assessment and needs analysis training, shelter management, and disaster preparedness activities. Accomplishments will eventually be evaluated against a baseline study carried out at the start of the project in late 2009.



Photo courtesy of SHARE Guatemala

Residents of San Rafael, Guatemala, learn about the USAID/OFDA-funded DRR project implemented by the SHARE-led consortium.

COMING UP

USAID/OFDA/LAC Annual Planning Meeting

USAID/OFDA staff and RDAP managers and disaster risk management specialists from throughout Latin America and the Caribbean will participate in the RDAP annual planning meeting in Miami, Florida, from May 24 to 28.

Participants will review program activities executed during the past year and plan activities for the upcoming year, with special emphasis on disaster risk reduction.

Meetings to Coordinate USAR Issues

USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan, who is also chairman of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) Regional Group for the Americas, along with USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor Rene Carrillo and RDAP specialists Santiago Baltodano and Manuel Santana, will participate in a series of INSARAG meetings in Geneva, Switzerland, in the coming weeks to discuss strengthening urban search and rescue (USAR) capabilities in the Americas and beyond.

An INSARAG inter-regional meeting on operational standards for domestic USAR teams is scheduled from May 31 to June 1; an after-action review meeting to evaluate the USAR response following the earthquake in Haiti is scheduled for June 2-3, and the INSARAG Steering Group meeting is scheduled to take place on June 4.

Second International ICS Forum in Ecuador

USAID/OFDA is supporting the Second Latin American Incident Command System (ICS) Forum scheduled to take place in Guayaquil, Ecuador, on June 10 and 11. Participating countries will share their experiences in implementing the ICS, learn about ICS implementation in the United States, and review technology advances that can improve the ICS during disaster situations.

USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor Sidney Velado, RDAP Technical Manager Fabián Arellano, and RDAP disaster risk management specialists including Luisa Alfaro, who coordinates the ICS component of the RDAP, will participate in the forum.

RDAP Workshops in Uruguay

USAID/OFDA disaster risk management specialist Jose Stevenazzi is coordinating a series of OFDA/LAC workshops to take place in Uruguay next month.

A session to update instructors of USAID/OFDA-designed courses is scheduled for June 14, a workshop to discuss damage assessment and needs analyses with strategic partners is scheduled for June 15, and a workshop to evaluate and follow up on the RDAP forest fire management component of the RDAP in Uruguay is scheduled to take place on June 16.

Hazardous Materials Analysis in Guatemala

USAID/OFDA disaster risk management specialist Ricardo Berganza is assisting Guatemala's National Coordinator for Disaster Reduction to organize a workshop scheduled for June 22 to analyze the risk of incidents involving hazardous materials and ways to reduce and prepare for these risks.

USAID/OFDA/LAC Regional Workshops

USAID/OFDA/LAC Regional Advisor Julie Leonard is organizing two USAID/OFDA regional workshops scheduled to take place in Costa Rica in July.

The first workshop, focusing on protection issues, is scheduled from July 13 to 14. The second, focusing on livelihoods, is scheduled from July 26 to 27.



Photo by Ricardo Herrera, USAID/OFDA

A boy in the north Atlantic region of Nicaragua looks over what is left of his home after the category 5 Hurricane Felix swept through the area in early September 2007.

USAID/OFDA Prepared to Respond Continued from page 1

of the Eastern Caribbean during the 2010 hurricane season.

In Haiti, already one of the most vulnerable countries in the region before the devastating January 12, 2010, earthquake left more than 1 million people homeless, USAID/OFDA opened a Program Office after the USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team stood down at the end of April. The office will continue to monitor USAID/OFDA-funded relief and recovery operations as well as help respond to hydro-meteorological events, including hurricanes and other storms, and promote activities aimed at enhancing the resiliency of Haitian populations.

In the event of an impending hurricane in the region, USAID/OFDA may pre-deploy disaster specialists, a regional advisor, an assessment team, or a fully equipped response team in consultation with U.S. embassies and USAID missions in affected countries.

USAID/OFDA continually replenishes stockpiled emergency relief supplies – including plastic sheeting for transitional shelters, water containers, water treatment units, hygiene kits, kitchen supplies, and blankets – for rapid shipment from the USAID/OFDA warehouse in Miami, Florida, to the LAC region in the event of a disaster. USAID/OFDA also purchases supplies locally when appropriate.

USAID/OFDA maintains agreements with charter air service companies in the region to ensure timely transportation of staff and supplies to disaster-affected areas.

USAID/OFDA team members are fully equipped with satellite and GPS communications gear to ensure vital communication after an event occurs – even if a country's telecommunications system has been affected.

In advance of hurricane season, as in years past, the LAC regional office briefs mission disaster relief officers and emergency action committees at U.S. embassies and USAID missions throughout Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean, and meets with key partners and other donors to coordinate hurricane preparedness activities.

"The time to prepare is now. We are reviewing our plans, strategies, and supplies. We cannot wait until August or September when the storms are approaching," said USAID/OFDA/LAC Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan.

During the past five years, USAID/OFDA has provided more than \$66 million in response to the devastating effects of hurricanes and other tropical storms in Central America and the Caribbean.

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