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**BUREAU FOR DEMOCRACY, CONFLICT, AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE (DCHA)  
OFFICE OF U.S. FOREIGN DISASTER ASSISTANCE (OFDA)**

## **Latin America and the Caribbean Snapshot<sup>1</sup>**

### **REGIONAL SUMMARY**

The countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)<sup>2</sup> are highly vulnerable to a range of natural hazards, including drought, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, landslides, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions. In addition, disasters triggered by environmental and industrial incidents—such as forest fires and chemical and oil spills—pose a potential threat. At times, El Niño Southern Oscillation meteorological events and poor land use management exacerbate the effects of hazards. Several countries in the region also remain vulnerable to civil unrest. In addition to Washington D.C.-based staff, USAID/OFDA bases six regional advisors in the San José, Costa Rica regional office.

### **RECENT HUMANITARIAN EVENTS IN THE REGION**

- On January 12, 2010, at 1653 hours local time, a magnitude 7.0 earthquake struck southern Haiti, killing an estimated 230,000 people and affecting approximately 3 million others. Within 24 hours following the earthquake, USAID deployed a USAID/Disaster Assistance Response Team (USAID/DART) to assess humanitarian conditions and coordinate activities with the humanitarian community. At the height of the response, the USAID/DART comprised 544 members, including 511 individuals from seven U.S. Urban Search and Rescue teams.
- On February 27, 2010, a magnitude 8.8 earthquake, the fifth largest ever recorded by the U.S. Geological Survey, occurred off the coast of Chile, affecting approximately 2 million people.
- During early April, heavy rains caused extensive flooding and landslides in Ríó de Janeiro, Niterói, and São Gonçalo cities in Ríó de Janeiro State, Brazil. The flooding and approximately 200 associated mudslides killed at least 180 people and displaced 24,000 others.

### **USAID/OFDA PRIORITIES FOR 2010**

- USAID/OFDA continues to prioritize hurricane preparedness in the Caribbean and Central America. Colorado State University's Hurricane Forecast team has predicted an above-average 2010 Atlantic basin hurricane season. USAID/OFDA maintains an experienced team of deployable disaster risk management specialists throughout the LAC region available for immediate deployment pre- or post-disaster. Furthermore, USAID/OFDA has developed standard operating procedures for seven likely scenarios involving hurricanes in the region, stockpiled relief commodities at the USAID/OFDA Miami warehouse, and prepared agreements with charter air service companies to ensure timely transportation of emergency relief supplies.
- USAID/OFDA also prioritizes disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities to safeguard livelihoods assets, prevent the loss of shelter, and build capacity for regional disaster management and response.

### **CHALLENGES**

- Frequent earthquakes, landslides, and volcanic eruptions continue to pose challenges for the LAC region. During hurricane season and regional rainy seasons, LAC countries are also highly vulnerable to floods and other storm-induced disasters.
- A lack of strong government infrastructure impedes efforts in some countries, including Haiti, to strengthen national disaster response capabilities.

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<sup>1</sup> For additional information on the humanitarian situation in Haiti and LAC, please see USAID/OFDA fact sheets and situation reports, available at [http://www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/humanitarian\\_assistance/disaster\\_assistance/](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/disaster_assistance/).

<sup>2</sup> LAC countries include Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, French Guiana, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

## **KEY LESSONS LEARNED IN 2009**

- Providing technical assistance to LAC countries strengthens regional, national, municipal, and local capacities for disaster preparedness and mitigation activities, as well as encourages intra- and inter-governmental coordination in response to emergency needs.
- Maintaining a network of 20 disaster risk management specialists and more than 200 on-call surge capacity response consultants strengthens USAID/OFDA's ability to quickly conduct damage and needs assessments following disasters.