



**USAID/Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance  
(USAID/OFDA)**

**Latin America and Caribbean  
(LAC) Region**

**DRR Strategy**

**For the Period of 2009-2013**

January 16, 2009

## Latin America and Caribbean Regional Office Mission Statement:

To lead U.S. Government humanitarian assistance in Latin America and Caribbean Region through disaster response, early recovery and risk reduction activities that strengthen national, local and community resilience to disasters and increase capacities to reduce risk.

### Background

Located within USAID, the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) is the lead U.S. Government office charged with providing humanitarian assistance in response to international emergencies and disasters. Additionally, USAID/OFDA provides assistance to help vulnerable populations prepare for, mitigate, respond to, and recover from these emergencies. USAID/OFDA recognizes the need to develop a longer-term strategic approach to its activities that will help articulate funding and program priorities, streamline decision-making, define responsibilities, and allow for a more definitive transition from humanitarian to developmental assistance.

Throughout the LAC region, USAID/OFDA's training program has evolved from training to technical assistance. In the LAC region, USAID/OFDA is well placed and recognized as the leader in disaster response and training. The USAID/OFDA Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, headquartered in San Jose, Costa Rica, has been in existence since 1983. During the early years, USAID/OFDA's work focused principally on responding to emergencies in the region. However, by the late 1980s, USAID/OFDA began to complement response activities with a program of training for first responders and emergency managers. Initially, USAID/OFDA entirely supported the training costs, but this **responsibility has been progressively assumed by the participating agencies themselves, leaving USAID/OFDA's contribution only a small percentage of the overall cost of training.**

Since the program's inception, more than 50,000 people have received training in a range of subjects related to emergency response, and at least 5,150 instructors have been certified to impart these courses. Organizations in 32 countries are participating in the training and technical assistance program. USAID/OFDA's set of standardized courses was developed with the active participation of the agencies that have benefited from the training, which has ensured their appropriateness for the LAC region.

**The program has evolved from external training to internal local training to, at present, primarily the provision of technical assistance from USAID/OFDA consultants to relevant parties in the host country.** For example, USAID/OFDA consultants provide technical assistance to support various countries in establishing their own training office and national program. USAID/OFDA provides vital technical assistance to national disaster management agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and others involved in DRR throughout the LAC region.

## Regional Hazards

The major natural hazards in this region are flooding as a result of tropical storms and hurricanes and earthquakes, landslides, volcanoes, and tsunamis, which result from the high level of seismic activity in the LAC region. In LAC, the priorities for non-response funding will be the retention of economic market and livelihoods assets, the prevention of housing loss, and develop disaster risk reduction (DRR) capacity at National, State, Municipal, and Local levels. In addition, a longstanding civil conflict in Colombia has created significant population displacement, both within the country and to neighboring countries.

### **Evolution of USAID/OFDA Training Program**

- USAID/OFDA staff directly conduct training
- USAID/OFDA staff train trainers in each country to conduct training
- USAID/OFDA-trained trainers conduct training, and USAID/OFDA no longer trains directly
- National level update, adoption, and insertion into national curriculum, and USAID/OFDA no longer funds training

## Disaster Risk Reduction

Disaster response capabilities cannot keep pace with increasing human and economic vulnerabilities, especially as population growth, economic development, and intrusion into ever more marginal areas exacerbate risk. Disaster risk reduction (DRR)—preventing or limiting adverse hazard impacts, especially within the context of sustainable development—is the only long-term solution to more effective disaster response. However, DRR, itself a complex combination of prevention, mitigation, and preparedness, is still conceptually and technically underdeveloped. Many DRR initiatives or programs are still in the incipient stage.

USAID/OFDA will fully conceptualize DRR within USAID/OFDA's mandate, stimulate new DRR activities, and strengthen existing DRR activities and programs in the LAC region. USAID/OFDA will document and analyze these programs, which may serve as models or templates for use within the LAC region and other regions.

The development of capacity of higher education institutions in the area of risk reduction is critical, as these academies are producing the future policy makers. The office has begun the Paul C. Bell, Jr., Risk Management Pilot Program and the communities of practice initiative to promote this objective.

Building on these initial efforts, USAID/OFDA will identify cases for risk reduction programming in areas recently affected by disasters, historically vulnerable areas, areas either undergoing rapid growth or slated for expansion, and areas undergoing post-disaster transition, in which active participation by a higher education institution is feasible. Identification of this type of opportunity will be completed in FY 2010.

USAID/OFDA is facilitating the exchange of information, seeking optimal coordination between, and, when necessary, mediating between key individuals and stakeholder groups involved in DRR efforts across the LAC region.

### Strategic Engagement with Key Partners

USAID/OFDA engages with interagency and other partners in both DRR and disaster response. USAID/OFDA works closely with the U.S. Military. The liaison officer to the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) shares information regarding the office's activities and also participates in SOUTHCOM's humanitarian assistance planning. USAID/OFDA supports Joint Humanitarian Operation Courses (JHOCs) and other trainings for military and civilian audiences. The USAID/OFDA senior regional advisor for LAC regularly meets with high-ranking SOUTHCOM staff to discuss strategy for emergency response. USAID/OFDA plans additional initiatives, including hiring a full-time military liaison officer based in the region office and continuing to work closely with SOUTHCOM on its Humanitarian Assistance Program.

USAID/OFDA engages with other USG interagency partners, including the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration (NOAA), U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and Peace Corps. USAID/OFDA aims to become more aware of ongoing activities of agencies with which USAID/OFDA has inter-agency agreements or that are represented in the USAID/OFDA Technical Assistance Group (TAG) and to influence their work agenda/program. This will become more important as USAID/OFDA broadens its support for mitigation activities.

USAID/OFDA plans to increasingly foster private sector involvement. Previous efforts to do so have proven advantageous for the office and the region, and have provided new sources of funding for community-based risk reduction activities. Because USAID/OFDA's approach has largely been *ad hoc*, there is a need for a more strategic approach for promoting engagement between public and private sectors. USAID/OFDA plans to evaluate efforts supported to date and investigate promising alternatives undertaken by USAID missions throughout the region.

USAID/OFDA has invested significant effort into strengthening the capacity of Missions in disaster response and risk reduction. The office will continue to offer annual workshops for Mission Disaster Relief Officers (MDROs) throughout the Caribbean and Latin America. These workshops have been highly rated by participants, including MDROs, alternate MDROs, NGO representatives, and other Mission staff.

### Coordination with Donors

Consultation with other donors, including the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the U.K. Department for International Development (DFID), the E.U., the World Bank, and regional development banks, will help USAID/OFDA to prioritize geographic areas or themes, coordinate programs, and possibly leverage additional resources.

## **Latin America and Caribbean Region Context**

### Caribbean Context

The Caribbean region is composed of small island states with stable democratic governments and relatively small populations. Destructive hurricanes and tropical

storms frequently occur during hurricane season from June through November. Hazards in the Caribbean include frequent and cyclical hydro-meteorological events, including hurricanes as well as tropical storms; seismicity; and volcanism.

USAID/OFDA's training program in the Caribbean, begun in 1991, has contributed to increase the capacity of host country governments and has constantly evolved to meet the needs of the region. At the outset, USAID/OFDA focused on training the personnel of regional and national emergency management agencies in response and preparedness activities. The cadre of USAID/OFDA trained professionals now lead trainings in their respective countries based on the USAID/OFDA methodology. USAID/OFDA's engagement with training in the region has shifted to technical assistance and support to trainers of USAID/OFDA courses and the constant development of course methodology.

The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) is the regional coordinating body for national disaster organizations (NDOs) in the region and USAID/OFDA supports their regional framework and DRR initiatives in the region.

The Caribbean region offers a unique context for USAID/OFDA interventions. The Caribbean region is affected by hydro-meteorological and geo-seismic hazards. The main impacts of these hazards on vulnerable populations are loss of shelter and deterioration of livelihoods. Because of stable, functioning governance in the region, USAID/OFDA has the ability support interventions at national, community, and household level in order to strengthen resiliency. As a result of USAID/OFDA's ongoing work and relationships in the region the U.S. Government is able to contribute resources to address the suffering. Additionally, staff in NDOs tend to stay in their positions beyond the change of administrations.

### Central America & Mexico (CAM) Context

The greatest hazards for CAM countries are hydro-meteorological, particularly floods; seismicity, including both earthquakes and volcanoes; and drought, leading to food insecurity. High poverty levels, particularly in the poorest countries in the region, increase vulnerability to disasters.

Capacity for disaster response in Central America & Mexico is relatively high; all countries have democratically elected governments and established national disaster management offices with staff and budgets. Leadership of disaster management offices changes with changes in governments, requiring regular outreach to new leadership to re-establish relationships.

There is a strong U.S. interest in Central America & Mexico, including involvement of SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM, respectively. CAM governments have strong relationships with the U.S. Government.

Regional political trends include decentralization, regional integration, and greater openness to regional free trade agreements. Regional integration in DRR and response

is incipient. Increasing economic openness may create opportunities for increasing private sector involvement in DRR in Central America.

## South America Context

South America is characterized by large cities, vast geographic regions, and sizeable populations, including urban populations. In most countries, significant economic disparity exists between urban and rural populations. In some countries, large indigenous populations, which are culturally and economically disparate from the rest of the populations, are increasing their demands for inclusion.

Governments in South America are democratically elected and manifest a wide range of capabilities. Some governments tend to be left-leaning and populist. Throughout much of the continent, governments have made a concerted effort at decentralization down to the provincial/departmental levels. A strong civil society with numerous syndicates exists across the region. Current leaders seek alternative opportunities for development, as there is a perception that previous leaders often failed to improve living conditions for the average citizen.

Hazards in South America include seismic activity on the Pacific coast, flooding, volcanoes, forest fires and tsunamis.

Significant displacement due to conflict exists in Colombia; however, due to the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Populations, Refugees, and Migration (State/PRM) and USAID/Colombia's level of engagement, USAID/OFDA has not funded activities in this area. USAID/OFDA is investigating options of engaging with partners to determine whether USAID/OFDA has an appropriate role in Colombia.

Although USAID/OFDA supports all countries in this region, the bulk of USAID/OFDA's DRR programs in South America will be targeted at the community level in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru, where natural disasters are more recurrent USAID/OFDA provides the most funding in response to disasters.

## **Regional Assumptions**

### Caribbean

- Strong NDO partnerships exist throughout the region.
- The national political systems of the countries in the region will remain stable.
- Regional coordination between Caribbean states will remain effective.
- Global climate change will impact this region by increasing the intensity and/or frequency of storms.
- Additional population expansion along the coastline will create greater vulnerability to hydro-meteorological events.
- The U.S. Military, through SOUTHCOM, will continue to be an active player in humanitarian assistance.

- Windows of opportunity following upcoming disaster impacts will create opportunities for DRR activities.

### Central America & Mexico

- Strong NDO partnerships exist throughout the region.
- The national political systems of the countries in the region will remain stable.
- Regional coordination between Central American states will increase related to disaster response and humanitarian assistance.
- Global climate change will impact this region by increasing the intensity and/or frequency of storms.
- The U.S. Military, through SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM, will continue to be an active player in humanitarian assistance.
- Windows of opportunity following upcoming disasters will create DRR opportunities.
- Free trade agreements may create opportunities for additional work with U.S. private sector actors.

### South America

- High levels of humanitarian needs and vulnerability will continue in pocket areas, particularly in the Andean region.
- Strong NDO partnerships exist throughout the region.
- The El Niño phenomenon and global climate change will continue to impact this region.
- Windows of opportunity following upcoming disasters will create DRR opportunities.

## **Regional Constraints**

### Caribbean

- A limited number of potential NGO partners exist in most countries.
- The logistics of bringing disaster management staff together for regional meetings are difficult.
- The small island populations lead to a limited human resource capacity.

### Central America & Mexico

- Changes in government administration may continue to erode human capacity in DRR, and disaster preparedness at all levels.
- The Central American Natural Risk Reduction Coordination Center (CEPREDENAC) is advancing the DRR agenda in Central America. There is an opportunity to support this agency to increase its DRR capacities and activities in the sub-region.

## South America

- Regional constraints include insecurity in certain areas, political hostility, and protest and demonstrations which may become violent
- The Andean Committee for the Prevention and Response to Disasters (CAPRADE) through the PREDECAN Project funded by the European Commission has begun to implement one pilot DRR project per country. However, is not sufficient to increase CAPRADE's capacity in DRR programming or its country members in South America. The window of opportunity to further support these initial DRR initiatives is there.

## Priority Program Selection

Given the hazards, assumptions, and constraints of the LAC region, USAID/OFDA intends to prioritize DRR activities that mitigate the deterioration of livelihoods and household assets and loss of shelter due to the impact of natural hazards. Additionally, USAID/OFDA will continue to evolve its ongoing capacity-building program.

## Goals

- Safeguard livelihood assets.
- Prevent the loss of shelter.
- Build capacity.

### **Goal 1: Safeguard livelihood assets.**

#### Explanation

Disasters in the LAC region commonly cause losses of and damages to assets, negatively affecting household livelihoods, and consequently, communities' ability to recover from disasters. USAID/OFDA will mitigate these risks through activities targeted to safeguard livelihood assets from the most common natural hazards. USAID/OFDA will identify the primary assets on which the most at-risk communities rely, and will implement community-level activities to reduce the assets' vulnerability to damage and loss.

#### **1.1 Purpose: Disaster Mitigation**

##### **Sector: Economic Recovery and Market Systems**

**1.1.1 Activity: Protecting Household-level Access to Finance** – These activities will address vulnerable communities by protecting households-level access to finance. Access to credit reduces recovery time following disaster for households in re-establishing their livelihoods. USAID/OFDA has provided assistance to national-level microfinance institutions to establish risk-financing instruments enabling those institutions to access additional resources following disaster to extend to affected households.

## **Sector: Agriculture and Food Security**

**1.1.2 Activity: Livestock Safeguarding** – USAID/OFDA will support activities to safeguard livestock in times of disasters. These activities may include livestock safeguarding prior to an impending storm, provision of small livestock feeding, and veterinary services.

## **Sector: Agriculture and Food Security**

**1.1.3 Activity: Strategic Seed Reserves** – USAID/OFDA is investigating opportunities for the development of strategic seed reserves at the community level to increase the resilience of communities to shock and reduce the recovery time required to reactivate the agricultural sector.

## **Sector: Natural and Technological Risks**

### **1.1.4 Activity: Coping Mechanisms for Culturally Unique Populations –**

USAID/OFDA sees much value in studying, documenting, and most importantly, supporting traditional survival strategies employed by minorities, with the intention of significantly upgrading the self-sufficiency of these communities in responding to crises.

## **Sector: Natural and Technological Risks**

**1.1.5 Activity: Land Use Planning** – USAID/OFDA will promote collaboration between universities, land use planning experts, and local communities. Participants will come together to exchange best practices and improve local land use planning and management and environmental practices, especially for high-risk zones.

## **Sector: Natural and Technological Risks**

**1.1.6 Activity: Leverage Private Sector Resources** – Fostering private sector involvement/partnership with government and NGO disaster/risk management efforts has proven to be advantageous throughout LAC, both in terms of in-kind and monetary support for disaster responses and new sources of funding for community-based risk reduction activities. To date, USAID/OFDA's approach has largely been *ad hoc*. A more strategic approach will include the following critical elements and activities:

- An external evaluation of the USAID/OFDA-funded Pan American Development Foundation (PADF) project to ascertain successes and potential future activities.
- Explore with USAID and Proyecto Alianzas (a regional USAID-funded project that builds public-private partnerships and is active in three Central American countries – Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua) ways to expand this endeavor to cover disaster/risk management in addition to response activities.
- Expand discussion with NDOs on this point.
- Extend “Pass the Baton”/sectoral DRR discussions to include the private sector.

## **Goal 2: Prevent the loss of shelter.**

### **Explanation**

Throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, natural hazards, including hydro-meteorological and seismic events, threaten to damage or destroy shelter. USAID/OFDA seeks to mitigate loss of shelter through various interventions.

### **2.1 Purpose: Mitigate Shelter Loss**

#### **Sector: Shelter and Settlements**

**2.1.1 Activity: Building Better** – In the wake of a major disaster that damages and destroys homes, USAID/OFDA responds with shelter assistance. Just as USAID/OFDA supports “building back better” following a disaster, USAID/OFDA will support “building better” as a mitigation initiative. To reduce the need for emergency and/or temporary shelter, USAID/OFDA will assist communities to build better in high risk zones. In addition, USAID/OFDA will support dialogue and dissemination of experiences on issues related to temporary shelter among experts and practitioners throughout the region.

#### **Sector: Natural and Technological Risks**

**2.1.2 Activity: Land Use Planning** – (See I.1.5 above)

#### **Sector: Natural and Technological Risks**

**2.1.3 Activity: Leverage Private Sector Resources** – (See I.1.6 above)

#### **Sector: Natural and Technological Risks**

**2.1.4 Activity: Support Coastal Management** – USAID/OFDA will support coast management agency interventions. Such interventions will include capacity building, creating and/or strengthening the dialogue between policymakers and scientists, and working with coastal management agencies to bridge science and policy.

## **Goal 3: Build capacity.**

USAID/OFDA has engaged in a capacity building program in the LAC region for the last 20 years. Over the years, the program evolved from focusing primarily on training for national and local disaster responders to a multi-layered technical assistance program. Countries in the region now implement USAID/OFDA-designed training curricula, with technical support from USAID/OFDA regional staff and consultants. In the coming years, USAID/OFDA will engage with regional, national, municipal and local authorities, as well as with communities directly, to continue to build capacity for disaster risk reduction and response.

Over the years, USAID/OFDA has devoted significant resources to build national capacity to prepare and respond to disasters. The current portfolio of 17 courses reflects this fact. USAID/OFDA has earned a privileged position in the LAC Region as the lead agency in capacity

building for first respondents. USAID/OFDA has trained staff from National Emergency Management Agencies, NGOs, private sector, and international organizations. The challenge ahead lies in how USAID/OFDA can continue to provide added value not only for first respondents but also for disaster risk reduction activities.

It is important to note that USAID/OFDA has not been directly involved in the health sector in the LAC region, but has supported the Pan American Health Organization over the years to create and maintain a core unit responsible of capacity building and disaster response in the Americas.

## **3.1 Purpose: Disaster Preparedness and Response**

### **Sector: Natural and Technological Risks**

**3.1.1 Activity: Strengthen Warning Systems** – Alert and warning systems ride a conceptual divide between preparedness and risk reduction. Support to early warning and alert systems builds on key USAID/OFDA strengths and experiences horizontally and vertically, through inter-agency agreements with key government partners and relationships, as well as at national and community levels, through building self-reliance and resilience.

### **Sector: Natural and Technological Risks**

**3.1.2 Activity: Community Shelters** – USAID/OFDA will promote the establishment and use of community shelters for areas with the highest risk of shelter damage and loss due to hydro-meteorological events. Early warning systems will also play a role in alerting communities to approaching storms and the need to seek safe shelter.

### **Sector: Natural and Technological Risks**

**3.1.3 Activity: Continued Evolution of Technical Assistance/Training Program** – Because a new cycle of the technical assistance/training program will begin in June 2009, USAID/OFDA will undertake an immediate review of the content of the program. The key steps in this process are:

- Canvassing of participating organizations to determine priorities
- Cross-reference of these priorities with key themes identified by USAID/OFDA
- Elimination of courses that are neither USAID/OFDA nor country priorities
- Consideration of new courses based on definition of priorities

On the basis of the findings of the review, the program will develop interventions to meet priority needs.

### **Sector: Natural and Technological Risks**

**3.1.3 Activity: Pre-positioning of Relief Supplies** – In Central and South America, numerous communities are extremely susceptible to isolation during emergencies, particularly floods. The logistics associated with delivering relief supplies to such communities during crises are both costly and complicated. Over the past three years, USAID/OFDA has had positive experience supporting pre-positioning of relief supplies. In 2009, the office will have completed an analysis of the traditionally vulnerable areas of the LAC region, and will have prioritized those areas for which pre-positioning will be supported.

## **3.2 Purpose: Disaster Risk Reduction**

### **Sector: Natural and Technological Risks**

**3.2.1 Activity: Supporting DRR Education** – USAID/OFDA will continue to support DRR education to primary, secondary, and university students, with interventions such as revision of teacher training curricula, assistance in developing in-service enrichment for instructors, and support to establishment of documentation centers at teacher training institutes.

### **Sector: Natural and Technological Risks**

#### **3.2.2 Activity: Institutionalization of Higher Education in DRR –**

USAID/OFDA will promote institutionalization of the role of higher education institutions in DRR because experience has demonstrated that concerted progress in risk reduction is possible if technical information, political will, and community acceptance converge. It is critical that higher education institutions develop capacity in the area of risk management, as these academies are producing the future policy makers. USAID/OFDA has begun two initiatives aimed at promoting this objective:

- Paul C. Bell, Jr., Risk Management Pilot Program: Over the past three years, USAID/OFDA has provided grants to selected higher education institutions in countries engaged in meaningful risk management instruction.
- “Communities of Practice” (COPs) in risk reduction: In 2005, USAID/OFDA identified a series of topics – environmental management, land use policy, and public investment – around which to focus its efforts in risk reduction. The office promoted and facilitated the establishment of a network of academic and practitioner experts from around the region, a COP to debate and produce guidance on the key themes mentioned above.
- Through Florida International University, USAID/OFDA will promote and strengthen at least 12 COPs by selectively providing strategic, high-impact, financial, scientific, and methodological support, then document and fully analyze those COPs.

### **Sector: Natural and Technological Risks**

**3.2.3 Activity: Support Coastal Management** – See 2.1.5 above