



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

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION



Photo courtesy of Bill Mortley, IFRC

Volunteers in St. Lucia conduct a survey to evaluate risk in the community as part of a USAID/OFDA-supported "Readiness to Respond" project being implemented by the Red Cross in several countries in the Caribbean.

USAID/OFDA Promotes DRR in the Caribbean

USAID/OFDA supports various projects to promote disaster risk reduction (DRR) in the Caribbean. Activities include evaluating disaster risks at the local level, involving youth in urban disaster preparedness efforts, raising community awareness of tsunamis and other coastal hazards, and ensuring hospitals are prepared for disasters.

Implemented by USAID/OFDA partners, these projects target different populations in different countries but all share the same basic goals: to save lives, alleviate suffering, and reduce the social and

economic impact of disasters.

The American Red Cross, in partnership with the International Federation and national Red Cross societies, is mid-way through the two-year USAID/OFDA-funded project entitled "Readiness to Respond: Increased Disaster Preparedness Capacity through Enhanced Coordination and Community Awareness." As part of the project, volunteers are carrying out community vulnerability and capacity assessments (VCAs), promoting family disaster preparedness planning, and strengthening

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USAID/OFDA is supporting a new project in Barbados to increase awareness of tsunamis and other coastal hazards in communities such as Welches Beach, at right.



Photo courtesy of the Barbados Coastal Zone Management Unit

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Jamaica USAR Course Held

As part of efforts to strengthen disaster response capabilities in Jamaica, the USAID/OFDA Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP) has trained Jamaican first responders in urban search and rescue (USAR) techniques.

Eighteen participants from the Jamaica Fire Brigade, Ministry of Health, Constabulary Force, and the Portmore Municipal Council successfully completed the Collapsed Structures Rescue Course, Light-Level. Two instructors from the Los Angeles, California, USAR team and four USAID/OFDA-trained instructors from the Caribbean collaborated to deliver the course last May.

The four Caribbean instructors were trained through the RDAP as part of a USAR training and technical assistance program begun three years ago to help strengthen response capabilities in the region. USAID/OFDA has also donated USAR equipment for the trainings and helped to set up training fields.



Photo courtesy of Abdias Samuel, St. Kitts and Nevis USAR Team
Jamaican emergency workers observe proper cribbing methods as part of a USAID/OFDA-supported light-level USAR course.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

School Safety Course Instructors Trained in the Caribbean Region

The USAID/OFDA-supported RDAP has trained 18 Caribbean participants to be instructors of the USAID/OFDA-designed School Safety Course. The new instructors are from the national disaster organizations of Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

RDAP disaster risk management specialists facilitated the training, which took place from August 17 to 19 in St. George's, Grenada.



Photo courtesy of Catholic Relief Services

As part of a USAID/OFDA-funded project in Jamaica, young men help remove brush and debris from the Riverton Gully and clear nearby drains to help prevent flooding during heavy rains.

Caribbean Projects Focus on Communities

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National Intervention Teams to assist with disaster response efforts in Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and Haiti.

"I recently visited some of these countries to discuss hurricane preparedness and was pleased to hear that things are moving along well with this project," said USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor John Kimbrough, who visited participating countries in the eastern Caribbean region in August.

As part of another USAID/OFDA-funded project entitled "Resiliencia: Strengthening Disaster Management Capacity of Vulnerable Communities," project participants in the Azua Province of the Dominican Republic are also carrying out VCAs. The project, implemented by Plan International, targets seven communities in the Azua Province that are particularly vulnerable to recurrent storm and flooding hazards. In addition to conducting the VCAs, the project is helping to establish community networks for disaster prevention, mitigation, and response.

In Jamaica, another USAID/OFDA-supported project implemented by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has involved local youths in efforts to promote community risk reduction. In recent months, for example, youth action committees have used flyers, skits, songs, and dance to communicate their message of hurricane and earthquake awareness and preparedness to audiences at schools, churches, and homes in low-income urban communities of Kingston. Committee members also helped to clean the Riverton Gully and nearby drains to help prevent flooding during heavy rains and helped rehabilitate a local school identified as a likely emergency shelter and disaster relief point for the community.

In Barbados, USAID/OFDA is supporting a six-month project to increase local community knowledge and awareness of tsunamis and other coastal hazards. As part of the project, implemented by the Barbados Department of Emergency Management's Coastal Zone Management Unit, national authorities will work with local community leaders to create basic maps showing vulnerable zones to assist with community hazard reduction, preparedness, and response plans.

Director Lorna Inniss explained that the project builds off a regional tsunami and other coastal hazard awareness project funded

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Emergency Supplies Pre-Positioned for Distribution as Needed in the Region

In preparation for the potential effects of the 2010 Atlantic hurricane season and other disaster risks, USAID/OFDA has pre-positioned emergency relief supplies in countries throughout the region, including in the Bahamas, Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, and St. Lucia.

The supplies, which include personal hygiene kits and other non-food items, have been consigned to the national emergency management organizations in these countries.

Some of the supplies have already been distributed.

In Honduras, for example, in response to heavy rains and floods in mid-August, the non-governmental organization World Vision, in coordination with Government of Honduras emergency commission COPECO, distributed approximately 300 of the pre-positioned hygiene kits to families in temporary shelters in Danli City, in southeastern Honduras.

In addition to the pre-positioned relief supplies, as part of hurricane preparedness efforts in the region USAID/OFDA has agreements in place with air charter service companies in the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Jamaica. These agreements will allow USAID/OFDA to quickly conduct aerial assessments and transport relief supplies and staff to affected areas as required.



Photo courtesy of PAHO

With USAID/OFDA support, PAHO is developing a guide to working with older persons during disasters, using a participatory approach that includes focus groups such as the one shown at left.

by USAID/OFDA and implemented in recent years by the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA).

USAID/OFDA also supports the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) to promote disaster risk reduction in the health sector.

As part of the Safe Hospitals Initiative, for example, PAHO has helped countries in the Caribbean assess the strengths and weaknesses of primary hospitals and health facilities using the Hospital Safety Index, a tool developed to assist in improving the health facilities in three main areas: structural aspects, including the foundation and building structure; non-structural aspects, including electrical installations and emergency exits, for example; and aspects pertaining to the functionality of the hospital in times of disaster.

PAHO provides technical assistance and training to national health officials to apply the index tool at larger hospitals with the idea that the countries can then proceed to assess all health facilities. In Jamaica, for example, PAHO assisted the Ministry of Health to assess two major hospitals; authorities then independently applied the index in five other health facilities throughout the country.

Other projects PAHO is carrying out in the Caribbean with USAID/OFDA support include developing a guide to working with older persons during disaster situations, updating the database of health professionals to be deployed as part of a regional emergency response team, and providing training and technical assistance to health ministries for disaster planning, mass casualty management, and incident command system implementation in health care facilities.

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