

OFFICE OF U.S. FOREIGN DISASTER ASSISTANCE (USAID/OFDA)

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, SAN JOSÉ, COSTA RICA



The USAID/OFDA warehouse in Miami stands ready to distribute supplies as needed to disaster impacted communities. Photo by USAID/OFDA

USAID/OFDA Prepares for the 2018 Hurricane Season

Residents of several Caribbean islands continue to recover from the impacts of several major hurricanes that passed through the Atlantic basin in 2017. With another active hurricane season forecast for this year, USAID/OFDA has been working diligently to ensure all facets of its risk reduction and response preparedness programs are in place.

USAID/OFDA's regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in San José, Costa Rica, is led by a senior regional advisor, supported by a team of four regional advisors (RAs), three information officers, a communications officer, and 29 disaster risk management specialists (DRMSs) located throughout the region. Team members are available for immediate deployment in case of an impending storm or disasters.

Additionally, the USAID/OFDA field office in Haiti has an RA and a program management specialist, who help coordinate potential responses to hydrometeorological hazards and other adverse events in the country. USAID/OFDA humanitarian assistance advisors to the military stationed at U.S. Southern Command in Miami, Florida, and a military liaison posted at Joint Task Force-Bravo in Honduras for the duration of hurricane season help coordinate USAID and U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) emergency humanitarian assistance activities in the region.

This year, the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has forecast an average Atlantic Basin hurricane season. On May 25, NOAA predicted a near or above normal hurricane season with up to 16 named storms likely to form in the Atlantic Basin during the 2018 season, of which five to nine

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USAID/OFDA maintains charter aircraft agreements to conduct aerial assessments, such as this one in Haiti following Hurricane Matthew, and distribute supplies following a disaster. Photo by Scott Fontaine, USAID/OFDA

MDRO Training in Costa Rica

To prepare for hurricane season and strengthen relationships prior to a potential disaster, USAID/OFDA hosted a meeting with mission disaster relief officers (MDROs) and their alternates from U.S. Government missions throughout the LAC region in Costa Rica from May 15–17. U.S. Ambassador to Costa Rica Sharon Day opened the event as representatives from 18 countries gathered to learn about USAID/OFDA's work in the region, MDRO roles and responsibilities, and lessons learned from previous disasters.

The MDRO plays a critical role in USAID/OFDA relief efforts, serving as the focal point at U.S. embassies for disaster-related information, planning, and activities in the host country. The MDRO must be familiar with the host government's disaster authorities and capabilities, as well as potential humanitarian partners in the country. In the aftermath of a disaster, MDROs continually liaise with the USAID/OFDA response team to ensure the free flow of information related to evolving disaster situations.

“The MDRO plays a critical role in fostering close ties with national emergency system representatives in the host country before a disaster strikes so that after a disaster event, humanitarian assistance can reach those in need in a timely and effective manner,” said RA Kimbrough.

The experience was enriched by open discussions between participating MDROs and USAID/OFDA RAs. RAs were able to clarify fundamental concepts and procedures for MDROs and MDROs with more experienced shared lessons learned with the group. As a result of this exchange, MDROs have the capacity to strengthen the regional office's potential response efforts, with improved knowledge and understanding of the local environment where they work, the stakeholders involved, and the connections that can be used to ensure USAID/OFDA's mandate—save lives, alleviate suffering, and lessen the economic and social impact of disasters.



U.S. Ambassador to Costa Rica Sharon Day and participants of the MDRO training. Photo courtesy of U.S. Embassy, San José

StoryMapJS: USAID/OFDA Disaster Risk Reduction
https://uploads.knightlab.com/storymapjs/...
StoryMapJS: USAID/OFDA Di...
Photo Credit: Scott Fontaine, USAID/OFDA
HAITI: BUILDING CAPACITY OF LOCAL DISASTER RESPONDERS
Helping countries strengthen their own ability to respond to disasters is a big
Disaster Risk Reduction in the Caribbean
In anticipation of the coming hurricane season, the USAID/OFDA communications team has produced an interactive web page to describe how USAID/OFDA prepares for and responds to disasters in the Caribbean. It can be viewed here:
Visit the Webpage Here

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may become hurricanes, including up to four that could develop into major hurricanes—Category 3 or higher on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale. Based on the 1981–2010 period, an average season has 12 named storms, including six hurricanes, three of which are major.

USAID/OFDA also maintains a roster of more than 400 local surge capacity consultants—including more than 100 in the Caribbean region—for activation to strengthen USAID/OFDA's assessment and response capabilities as needed. The consultants are located in countries throughout the LAC region and, along with DRMSs, provide disaster risk reduction (DRR) and response preparedness training and technical assistance to partners in the LAC region.

USAID/OFDA maintains a warehouse near the international airport in Miami, Florida, with a large stock of emergency relief supplies—including blankets, hygiene kits, kitchen supplies, plastic sheeting for transitional shelters, and water storage units—available for rapid shipment to affected countries, as appropriate. USAID/OFDA also supports partners to maintain emergency relief stockpiles in Haiti and purchases emergency supplies locally, as appropriate.

To guarantee rapid deployment of staff and supplies during a disaster, USAID/OFDA maintains 16 aircraft charter purchase order agreements in 10 countries throughout the LAC region. USAID/OFDA may also request DoD assistance if commercial air services are not available.

USAID/OFDA RA John Kimbrough has traveled to the Caribbean in recent months to finalize preparations with key partners and will continue to visit the region throughout hurricane season. “It is important that we thoroughly prepare for hurricane season, regardless of the forecast. Because it only takes one storm to cause significant humanitarian impacts,” RA Kimbrough said.

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