Fifteen months after Hurricane Matthew struck southwestern Haiti, affecting nearly 2.1 million people, USAID/OFDA continues to provide shelter assistance to Haitian families whose homes were damaged or destroyed during the storm. Immediately after the Category 4 hurricane made landfall, USAID/OFDA supported the provision of emergency shelter assistance to nearly 300,000 people, including the distribution of more than 9,000 rolls of reinforced plastic sheeting. In the months following the storm, USAID/OFDA began to implement the second phase of the shelter assistance, focused on helping acutely affected families to build back safer.

With nearly $6.7 million in USAID/OFDA funding, four humanitarian organizations in Haiti—Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and J/P Haitian Relief Organization (J/P HRO)—continue to implement the Build Back Safer (BBS) shelter assistance program, which provides durable shelter solutions for vulnerable households in Haiti’s Grand’Anse and Sud departments.

Through the BBS program, USAID/OFDA partners have provided technical assistance and durable shelter materials to more than 10,000 households in hurricane-affected communities, benefiting an estimated 50,000 people. Additionally, USAID/OFDA partners have trained local carpenters, builders, and community members to ensure the inclusion of technically sound seismic and cyclone-resistant techniques—such as wind bracing—adapted to houses’ structures. The program has also strengthened household disaster risk reduction capacity by providing training and instructional materials to build community awareness of disaster preparedness and mitigation practices.

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USAID/OFDA supports IOM—Haiti’s shelter working group lead—to implement two BBS-related programs. One program features a sensitization campaign to promote construction best practices and the benefits of safe building techniques for Haitian populations. The second program comprises BBS training activities for Haitian construction workers to enhance home building and repair skills, using state-of-the-art building techniques.

The sensitization campaign has focused on using humor, music, and popular culture to disseminate critical messages to influence the public to use safe construction techniques when rebuilding or repairing houses. In addition to TV and radio advertisements touting the benefits of proper construction techniques, the campaign has used social media and text messages to disseminate the information, and printed educational posters and calendars for public distribution.

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The BBS training workshops have provided several hundred Haitian builders, carpenters, and community members with knowledge about the latest building techniques, many of which were developed specifically for the Haitian context. The workshops included instruction on tying down roof structures for resilience to hurricane-force winds and how to properly brace walls to enhance seismic resistance during an earthquake. All of the trainings featured hands-on participation so that trainees received practical experience using the construction methods and are prepared to use the skills they learned in their communities.

USAID/OFDA remains committed to helping vulnerable Haitian families build back safer homes.