

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

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



Pulikumana community members present a sample of traditional meals they prepared with produce from the community orchard. Photo by Irene Gago, USAID/OFDA

### Helping Wayuu Communities in La Guajira, Colombia, Adapt to Drought

Prolonged drought conditions related to the El Niño phenomenon have adversely affected Colombia's northern La Guajira Department and exacerbated food insecurity and malnutrition among ethnic Wayuu populations living in isolated, desert areas. To help improve the lives of drought-affected indigenous communities in La Guajira, USAID/OFDA is supporting activities to develop resilient agricultural practices, improve livestock management and access to water sources, and restore livelihoods.

With USAID/OFDA funding, between 2017 and 2019, non-governmental organization (NGO) Acción Contra el Hambre (ACH) helped nearly 1,700



Yanama project provides mobile sheds with laying hens to Wayuu communities in La Guajira. Photo by Irene Gago, USAID/OFDA

Wayuu families improve agricultural practices and mitigate the impact of drought on their crops and livestock. The project—entitled “Yanama,” which means collective work—worked with 15 indigenous communities to create community gardens utilizing drought resistant agriculture techniques, such as controlled drip irrigation systems. The program provided communities with different varieties of corn, bean, and vegetable seeds and trained them to test which ones can better adapt to dry weather.

In addition, ACH implemented a food security early warning system in two of the beneficiary communities utilizing a “sentinel site” surveillance methodology, which allows communities to monitor food security risks by recording rainfall, crop yields, food reserves, crop pests, livestock diseases, children malnutrition, and illnesses, among other relevant indicators. The sentinel surveillance system is implemented through a participatory approach that empowers Wayuu communities to determine food security indexes, and generate critical information to identify, monitor, and establish actions to prevent or minimize food security risks. It also allows for national and local disaster risk management entities to respond to potential food security crises in a timely and effective manner.

“Our primary purpose is to help build the resilience of the most vulnerable Wayuu communities who have been threatened by prolonged periods without rain. By assisting them in adapting their farming techniques to a changing  
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A group of 14 representatives from Ecuador and Peru participates in FIU's study tour in February. Photo courtesy of Laura Trejos, USAID/OFDA

## USAID/OFDA Supports Ecuador and Peru's Risk Management Systems

In late February, 14 high-ranking representatives from Ecuador and Peru's Risk Management Systems—including directors from the Municipality of Guayaquil's Disaster Risk Management Office, and Peru's National Fire Department—participated in a USAID/OFDA-supported emergency operations systems technical exchange, hosted by Florida International University (FIU) at its Extreme Events Institute in Miami, Florida.

From February 24 to 28, the group visited several emergency operations centers and a 911 operations center to observe how the state's emergency management system (EMS) operates and to study best practices and lessons learned.

Attendees also participated in workshops to learn about the emergency operations centers and how they implement the Incident Command System during a disaster.

"USAID/OFDA technical exchanges and study tours aim to promote collaboration between higher education institutions and risk management agencies, helping to facilitate new ideas and strengthen agencies throughout the LAC region," explained USAID/OFDA Disaster Risk Management Specialist Michael Camchong.

"It is extremely beneficial for the participants to experience, interact, and learn from the EMS professionals here in Miami so that they can take this knowledge home and implement the best practices within their home country systems," continued DRMS Camchong.

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climate and providing them tools to improve livestock management, we can help improve food security," said USAID/OFDA Program Officer Jamie Johnson Thomas.

With USAID/OFDA support, ACH also delivered sheds with laying hens and goats to communities and provided technical assistance to strengthen family livestock production systems and agricultural techniques, including seed procurement, soil preparation, and integrated pest and disease management.

"Egg production is simple, economical, and can be implemented in dry climates. The provision of sheds with laying hens to Wayuu communities has helped solve food insecurity immediately and for at least two years. The sheds feature wheels, which make them mobile; communities can move their position according to weather conditions," said ACH Food Safety and Livelihoods Coordinator Leidy Contreras.

Project beneficiary and leader of JerJet community Elaida Pushaina commented, "The project helped us create a community garden where we produce drought-resistant plant varieties, including chili, squash ("ayutama"), coriander, tomato, corn, cassava, melon, and beans that supplies food to 63 families. They also supported the installation of a rainwater collector and a controlled drip irrigation system. Before, we depended on rain to irrigate, but now we learned how we could do it without rain."

"One of the greatest benefits of the Yanama program over the past two years was the delivery of 10 sheds and 200 laying hens that provided households access to the minimum daily protein requirement," said Pulikumana community leader Jairo Ipoana.

With additional USAID/OFDA FY 2020 funding, ACH plans to provide further support over the next three years to some of the communities that participated in the first phase of the program, while expanding the program to other Wayuu communities affected by prolonged dry conditions. This new phase of the project will also include water, sanitation, and hygiene and disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities, in addition to livelihood support.

"In this second phase, we want to help the communities to make the practices learned in the first phase sustainable for them. For example, in the first phase, we provide laying hens; now we want to teach them how to reproduce them. For us, it is essential to ensure that they can continue production processes by themselves once we stop the assistance," noted Leidy Contreras.

The new phase of the Yanama project aims to increase communities' access to water sources and strengthen knowledge and skills related to water treatment and storage. During this new phase, ACH will also help communities restore their livelihoods. The project's goal is to support more than 200 fishery and handicraft businesses and strengthen school teacher's capabilities to help students develop entrepreneurial skills.

While drought continues to affect Wayuu communities, USAID/OFDA agriculture and livelihood assistance in La Guajira demonstrates the value of supporting households and communities to build self-reliance and adapt to natural hazards.



With USAID/OFDA support, ACH installed a controlled drip irrigation system at the Jerjet community. Photo by Irene Gago, USAID/OFDA