

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

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

### USAID/OFDA Hurricane Season Preparation Efforts

USAID/OFDA has begun its preparedness efforts in anticipation of the 2020 hurricane season, which starts in the eastern Pacific basin on May 15 and the Atlantic basin on June 1, and ends on November 30.

The Pacific has already experienced storm activity ahead of the 2020 hurricane season, with the formation of Tropical Depression One-E on April 25 marking the earliest storm formation in the northeast Pacific basin since reliable records began in 1966. This broke the previous record for the earliest forming storm held by Tropical Storm Adrian in 2017, which formed on May 9 of that year. In the Atlantic, Tropical Storm Arthur formed on May 16, 2020, marking the sixth consecutive year with a pre-season system.

The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has forecast an above-normal 2020 hurricane season in the Atlantic and a near- or below-normal season in the eastern Pacific. In the Atlantic, NOAA predicts 13 to 19 named storms, of which six to 10 could become hurricanes, including three to six major hurricanes of Category 3 or higher on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale. NOAA forecasts the formation of 11 to 18 named storms in the eastern Pacific, including five to 10 hurricanes, of which one to five could become major hurricanes.

“Regardless of the seasonal outlook, it only takes one storm to cause a tremendous amount of damage—as Hurricane Dorian showed us last year,” said USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor (SRA) Tim Callaghan. “USAID/OFDA works year-round with countries in the Caribbean to facilitate preparedness efforts and fortify local disaster management capacities. Also, we have procedures in place that enable us to respond quickly and efficiently in multiple countries, if necessary.”

SRA Callaghan and five other regional advisors (RA)—experienced, multilingual disaster management professionals with extensive knowledge



USAID/OFDA is engaging with local governments and humanitarian partners in the region to coordinate hurricane season preparedness activities. *Photo by USAID/OFDA*



In 2019, USAID provided more than \$2.8 million in humanitarian funding to support the Government of Bahamas response to Category 5 Hurricane Dorian—the most powerful to ever strike The Bahamas. *Photo by USAID/OFDA*

of the region’s hazards, geography, and cultural and socio-economic characteristics—are based at the USAID/OFDA regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in San José, Costa Rica.

These advisors, along with two information officers, three communications officers, 29 disaster risk management specialists, and more than 400 on-call local surge capacity consultants, are available for immediate deployment in the event of a disaster. The specialists and surge capacity consultants are the backbone of the USAID/OFDA-supported Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP), which provides technical assistance and support for disaster risk reduction and preparedness to national disaster organizations and first responders throughout the region.

At the USAID/OFDA country office in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, an acting RA, a program management specialist, and administrative support staff, work with the Government of Haiti and partners to strengthen national and local disaster preparedness and response capabilities and remain ready to respond to hydro-meteorological events, including hurricanes and tropical storms, as appropriate.

At U.S. Southern Command in Miami, Florida, USAID/OFDA humanitarian assistance advisors to the military help coordinate USAID and U.S. Department of Defense emergency humanitarian assistance in the region.

In the event that a storm is forecast to impact land in the region, USAID/OFDA may activate or pre-deploy local surge capacity consultants, disaster specialists, a regional advisor, an assessment team, or a fully equipped response team in consultation with U.S. missions in potentially affected countries.

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## Hurricane Season Preparedness continued from page 1

USAID/OFDA continually replenishes stockpiled emergency relief supplies—including plastic sheeting for temporary shelters, water treatment units, water containers, hygiene kits, kitchen supplies, and blankets—in a USAID/OFDA warehouse in Miami for rapid shipment to disaster-affected areas. USAID/OFDA also procures and stockpiles relief commodities locally when appropriate.

USAID/OFDA maintains agreements with 14 charter air service companies in the region to ensure the timely transportation of personnel and supplies to disaster-affected areas. If commercial air service is not available, USAID/OFDA may request logistical assistance from the U.S. military.

In advance of hurricane season, the LAC regional office briefs mission disaster relief officers and emergency action committees at U.S. embassies and USAID missions throughout the region, and also meets with host governments, key partners, and other donors to coordinate hurricane preparedness activities.

“We have worked for years to forge strong relationships with our partners and key actors in the Caribbean countries, to secure provisions, and review preparedness plans and protocols now, long before a storm strikes,” explained USAID/OFDA RA John Kimbrough.

This year, unlike in years past, the preparedness meetings are taking place virtually as the office has modified its procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic. “Certainly we have had to change the way we are conducting our preparedness efforts,” commented RA Kimbrough, “but everyone is of the same mindset, hurricane season is going to happen, so we have to be ready.”



In September 2019, USAID deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART), comprising more than 100 disaster response experts and search-and-rescue (SAR) personnel, to lead and coordinate the U.S. humanitarian response to Hurricane Dorian in The Bahamas. Photo by USAID/OFDA

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USAID/OFDA has a roster of more than 400 surge consultants in LAC region that can be activated to expand the office's response capacity. Photo by Irene Gago, USAID/OFDA

## USAID/OFDA Provides Virtual Training to Caribbean Surge Capacity Consultants

As the hurricane season approaches, USAID/OFDA is strengthening the capacity of its roster of surge capacity consultants in the Caribbean region to prepare for and quickly respond to a disaster in their home countries.

The USAID/OFDA surge capacity consultant program is unique to the LAC region. It comprises more than 400 local consultants in 30 countries that available at a moment's notice to expand USAID/OFDA capacity to gather information and respond quickly to a disaster. They are also familiar with the local context and provide USAID/OFDA with a vital link to local organizations and community groups in their home country.

Between April and May, Caribbean-based USAID/OFDA disaster risk management specialists (DRMS) held virtual training sessions to surge capacity consultants. Virtual sessions included training on initial damage assessments damage and needs assessments. These skills are critical for assessing the level of damage to an area accurately and communicating the most vital needs following a disaster.

The DRMSs are also training surge capacity consultants on the reporting needs pre and post-disaster, including the need for photo and video reporting to assist in meeting USAID/OFDA's

information sharing needs.

USAID/OFDA may activate surge capacity consultants in anticipation of an approaching hurricane to gather information on preparedness efforts by the host government, institutions, and the population. Following a disaster, USAID/OFDA provides humanitarian assistance based on needs; therefore reports from surge capacity consultants are essential to make well informed financial and programming decisions.

“After a disaster strikes, it's important to quickly identify the most urgent needs of the impacted population,” commented USAID/OFDA RA Kimbrough. “Having surge capacity consultants on the ground providing this information facilitates our work with implementing partners to provide relief where it is needed rapidly.”



After a disaster strikes, USAID/OFDA can activate surge consultants to assess damage and quickly identify the most urgent needs. Photo by Irene Gago, USAID/OFDA