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SUCCESS STORY

USAID-Trained USAR Teams Respond to Ecuador Earthquake

For more than 20 years, USAID has provided advanced training in disaster response to urban search-and-rescue (USAR) teams across Latin America, including teams that deployed to assist with the April 2016 Ecuador earthquake response.

As a result, expert USAR teams from 12 countries, including Ecuador, were able to rapidly coordinate and effectively respond to disaster-affected areas of Ecuador immediately following the earthquake, rescuing 113 people trapped inside collapsed buildings.



Photo by Maureen Thompson, USAID

USAID RDAP sub-regional manager Fabian Arellano reunites with Baltazar Solano, a leader of the Salvadoran USAR team deployed to Ecuador. Solano, who has worked with Arellano in the past, estimates that 80 percent of his colleagues have participated in USAID training courses. Arellano encountered dozens of past trainees during the Ecuador earthquake response.

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Photo courtesy of Fabian Arellano, USAID

USAID staff pose with Lt. Ricardo Mendez, a USAID-trained USAR leader from Pasto, Colombia, displaying a shirt designating his status as a BREC instructor. The BREC training course, sponsored by USAID, teaches search-and-rescue techniques highly specific to collapsed structure responses.

On April 16, 2016, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck off the coast of northwestern Ecuador, severely impacting an estimated 720,000 people, primarily in Ecuador's Esmeraldas and Manabí provinces.

Within hours of the earthquake, USAR teams from South America, Central America, the Caribbean, North America, and Europe placed emergency response personnel on stand-by to deploy to disaster-affected regions of Ecuador, where the earthquake had damaged and destroyed thousands of homes and businesses and significantly impaired public infrastructure. Following a request from the Government of Ecuador, USAR teams from Chile, Colombia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Spain, and Venezuela traveled to Ecuador to join Ecuadorian USAR teams already conducting immediate search-and-rescue activities.

The successful coordination of these international teams during the days following the earthquake was aided in part by the numerous hours of USAID-led training that many of the first responders had received in previous years through USAID's Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP). RDAP aims to build the capacity of USAR teams in Latin America and the Caribbean through the delivery of courses such as collapsed structure rescue, first response, medical first response, basic life support, hazardous materials, and incident command system. By supporting enhanced training and coordination, USAID helps USAR teams in the region to excel, improving life-saving disaster response.