USAID/OFDA Assists Families Affected By Heavy Rains and Floods in Paraguay

Months of unusually heavy rains across Paraguay caused widespread flooding that, by mid-June, had affected approximately 200,000 people in eight departments, as well as the capital district of Asunción, according to the Government of Paraguay (GoP) National Emergency Secretariat (SEN).

The intense rainfall and flooding from the overflowing Paraguay and Paraná rivers damaged roads, houses, schools, and other public infrastructure and adversely affected agriculture and other livelihoods in the affected departments of Alto Paraguay, Alto Paraná, Central, Concepción, Itapúa, Misiones, Neembucú, and Presidente Hayes.

On June 9, as flooding continued to displace inhabitants, the GoP requested humanitarian assistance from the U.S. Government. In response, U.S. Ambassador to Paraguay James H. Thessin declared a disaster due to the effects of the floods and USAID/OFDA provided $200,000 to Paraguay, through the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), to support emergency relief assistance for affected families.

On June 11, USAID/OFDA activated a two-person assessment team to conduct a needs assessment.

ADRA/Paraguay volunteers distribute USAID/OFDA-funded emergency supplies to displaced families in Puerto Falcón, Presidente Hayes Department.
Paraguay University Inaugurates Risk Management Certificate Program

On July 7, Our Lady of Asunción Catholic University (UCA) in Paraguay, with support from SEN, REDULAC, and USAID/OFDA, inaugurated the country’s first international disaster risk management certificate program (“diplomado”).

The six-week program aims to strengthen participants’ understanding of the theoretical and practical aspects of disaster risk management, including DRR. Developed within the framework of the National Education Plan for Risk Management by the Appropriate Technology Center at UCA’s School of Science and Technology, the continuing education certificate program consists of 160 academic hours divided into four modules, culminating in a flood response simulation exercise on the final day, August 16. Twenty-four students enrolled in the program, hailing from SEN, government ministries, municipal governments, police and armed forces, and public services companies.

“We are developing tools to create hazard maps in collaboration with the population of a community, for example, an urban neighborhood prone to flooding. Rapid implementation of this mechanism could contribute to reduced vulnerability,” said program participant Lina E. Rivelli, who holds a civil engineering degree from UCA.

USAID/OFDA provided $30,000 to the university to support the program, including student scholarships and the participation of five international instructors from Argentina, Colombia, Peru, and the United States who joined Paraguayan instructors. Additionally, USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor Phil Gelman facilitated the urban DRR and resilient cities section of the program.

Representatives from REDULAC, USAID/Paraguay, SEN, UCA’s School of Science and Technology, and USAID/OFDA inaugurated the program.

Displaced children in Paraguay’s capital greet ADRA/Paraguay representatives delivering USAID/OFDA-funded emergency supplies.

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response team in Paraguay, led first by USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor Phil Gelman and later by Disaster Risk Management Specialist Carlos Córdova, and which also included Paraguay-based local surge capacity consultant Jorge Martín. The USAID/OFDA team visited shelters and affected areas in Asunción and Ñeembucú Department, and met with local government officials and humanitarian workers involved in the disaster response efforts.

The situation affected more than 3,700 students in approximately three dozen schools. Per the National Education Plan for Risk Management—which GoP education officials developed with USAID/OFDA technical assistance in 2011—the GoP Ministry of Education and Culture deployed mobile classrooms and sent teachers to shelters to ensure flood-affected children had access to education.

SEN collaborated with other GoP authorities and organizations to provide humanitarian assistance to affected populations, including food and emergency shelter. Elevated water levels on the Paraguay and Paraná rivers isolated some low-lying communities, complicating emergency relief efforts early on.

In Ñeembucú Department, water levels at the bi-national hydroelectric power stations Itaipú and Yacyretá, on the Paraná River, also increased, affecting communities downstream, according to SEN. ADRA/Paraguay used the USAID/OFDA funds to locally purchase mattresses, blankets, 20-liter water containers, and water purification kits to benefit more than 2,250 affected families in Asunción and Ñeembucú, Presidente Hayes, and San Pedro departments. The distribution of relief supplies was carried out in close coordination with SEN, as well as departmental and municipal authorities.

Paraguay Vice-President Juan Afara, SEN Minister Joaquín Roa, GoP Vice-Minister of Public Health María Teresa Barán, and U.S. Ambassador Thessin attended the ceremonies to donate the emergency supplies.

Additionally, the U.S. Department of Defense, through the Office of Defense Cooperation at the U.S. Embassy in Asunción, implemented a $15,000 minimal cost project for the local purchase and distribution of additional mattresses for flood-affected populations.

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Paraguay Universities Form National REDULAC Chapter

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Paraguay charter agreement on June 11. SEN and USAID/OFDA representatives attended the ceremony as honorary witnesses and supporters. During the event, participants selected Rubén Urbieta from UCP as the REDULAC Paraguay national coordinator.

REDULAC Paraguay plans to hold an inter-university workshop at UCP on September 18 to define a work plan for the 2014-2015 period. USAID/OFDA will support the meeting.

National REDULAC chapters have been established or are in the process of being established in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. USAID/OFDA has supported the chartering of a number of these national chapters, most recently in Chile and Brazil.

USAID/OFDA also sponsored the REDULAC-organized Latin American Forum on DRR in Higher Education, which took place in Panama in August 2012.