A Distinguished Career in Disaster Management

USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor Julie Leonard worked closely with the LAC regional team since 1998, participating in responses to Hurricane Mitch in Nicaragua and Honduras as well as to the effects of the El Niño phenomenon in Peru.

She became a regional advisor in September 2002 and staffed the LAC sub-regional office in Barbados until January 2007. Julie was deeply involved in one of USAID/OFDA’s first large disaster risk reduction (DRR) programs with the Caribbean Development Bank and championed other regional initiatives. She worked closely with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency to move the comprehensive disaster management agenda forward throughout the region.

Julie was particularly committed to building capacity in Haiti. In the early 2000s, Julie made important contacts with the Direction de la Protection Civile and first responder agencies, overseeing the commencement of the USAID/OFDA training program in Haiti. She served as the USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) leader managing the response to the devastation caused by four major storms in Haiti in 2008. Julie also spent

Colleagues throughout Latin America and the Caribbean Remember Julie Leonard, Humanitarian Extraordinaire

Colleagues from the USAID/OFDA regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), national governments, first response agencies, humanitarian organizations, communities, and friends throughout the region are remembering and honoring USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor Julie Leonard, a dedicated disaster management professional who passed away on April 28 after a brief battle with cancer.

USAID/OFDA Deputy Director Carol Chan noted that Julie “was passionate about helping the poorest of the poor and gave 110 percent all the time… She was responsible over her career for saving millions of lives and reducing the suffering of millions. She made a difference!”

“Everyone in the San José regional office and throughout the LAC region will miss Julie greatly. She was a key part of our team for many years and we hope to continue to carry out her legacy for years to come,” said USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan.

“We must give thanks for every day that we could live with her, for all the lessons and smiles she shared, and give thanks for every life that Julie helped save,” said Colombia-based USAID/OFDA Disaster Risk Management Specialist (DRMS) Jacqueline Montoya.

Jamaica-based DRMS Audrey Mullings agreed. “We remember her for her kindness and thoughtfulness as a wonderfully caring human being, and in the field of disaster management for her professionalism, dedication, and interest in the region.”

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Julie smiles during her retirement party at the USAID/OFDA/LAC regional office in September 2015. Photo by Margarita Franco, USAID/OFDA

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Following the news of her death, condolences came pouring into USAID/OFDA from near and far.

“Costa Rica and the entire region mourns the loss of this functionary; we know the qualities that characterized her dedication to the themes that engage both the National Commission for Risk Prevention and Disaster Response (CNE) and USAID/OFDA,” wrote CNE President Ivan Brenes.

From Peru, Luis René Vallenas, Deputy Director of Operations Management from the Response Division of the National Civil Defense Institute (INDECI), noted that Julie was a distinguished humanitarian “who visited Peru on countless occasions and demonstrated her great vocation for service and commitment to those most in need in our country. We wish to express our profound and heartfelt condolences to her family and her colleagues at USAID for this irreparable loss.”

“Julie was a role model… Her patience and wicked sense of humor made dealing with all sorts of natural disasters less of the horror than it could have been,” commented Mary Ellen T. Gilroy, Deputy Chief of Mission of the U.S. Embassy in Bridgetown, Barbados, from 2004 to 2007.

In the Caribbean, Julie will be remembered for her work to strengthen early warning systems for tsunamis and other coastal hazards, as well as community preparedness efforts “down to the last mile,” a subject she was always happy to discuss with anyone who was interested.

“I can’t tell you the number of meetings I have attended where people would ask ‘how’s Julie doing’ or ‘when is Julie coming back?’” said USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor John Kimbrough, who oversees USAID/OFDA disaster response and risk reduction activities in the Caribbean.

For everyone who knew Julie, the knowledge that she is gone is a sad and somber reality that is offset only slightly by the fact that she lived a deeply dedicated, purposeful existence that improved the lives of countless people around the world. She will be sorely missed, but her legacy lives on.